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A BLUEGRASS CAVALIER

EDWIN CARLILE LITSEY



A BLUEGRASS CAVALIER

BY
EDWIN CARLILE LITSEY

Author of

"The Race of the Swift," "The Love Story of Abner Stone,"
"The Man from Jericho," etc., etc.



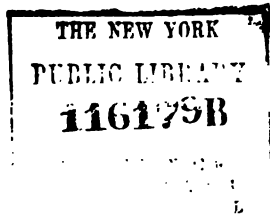
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Dedication

To all those who believe that Romance is
not dead, and who love a tale of high
adventure: this book is offered.

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A BLUEGRASS CAVALIER

PLACE: KENTUCKY

PERIOD: 1850

PEOPLE OF THE STORY:

Col. Shadrach Brentley, *Landowner and Gentleman Farmer*

Emmeline Brentley, *Spinster, His Sister*

Saul Brentley, *His Son and Hero of the Story*

Capt. Jonathan Pembroke, *Farmer*

Dorothy Pembroke, *His Daughter and Heroine of the Story*

Mehitabel Pembroke, *His Old Maid Sister*

Jinsy Galory, *Waiting Maid at McClair's Tavern*

Margot LaTour, *Friend to Dorothy, Kidnapped*

Abe, *Negro Servant to Saul*

Sime, *Negro Servant to Col. Brentley*

— Mordecai Fode, *Tramp Philosopher*

Gypsy (or Jews-harp) George, *Ferryman*

Cadwallader Hull, *Landlord at the Sign of The Leaning Stump*

Mack Leek, *Bandit Leader*

Georgey Snipper, *His Satellite*

Deef Dick, *Stage Driver*

Big Sam Pottle, *Drover*

Little Sam Pottle, *His Son, Drover*

Sis Tomperby, *a Hag*

Manse Higbee, *Landlord of The Limping Dog*

Moll Higbee, *Landlady of The Limping Dog*

Uncle Bacchus, *Negro Servant to Capt. Pembroke*

— Noey Mole, *Saddler and Preacher*

Gaston Chavannes, *of Philadelphia, Dandy and Good Fellow, In Love with Margot*

Uncle Jacky Bibb, *Local Autocrat and Arbiter*

Ephri-ham Stout, *Bogus Englishman*

and

Roderick Dhu, *Saul's Collie Dog*

Paddyfoot, *Mordecai Fode's Pet Bear*

A BLUEGRASS CAVALIER

I

Containing the most unreasonable demand of Colonel Shadrach Brentley, and how Saul, his son, met it.

COLONEL SHADRACH BRENTLEY was the master of a thousand acres of Kentucky soil, woodland, meadow, and tilled fields. The old brick home with its colonial porticoes rested upon an eminence facing the river, whose life-giving waters had from time immemorial flowed through the bottom lands of this estate.

It was on a certain morning in late April in the year 1850 that Colonel Shad sat by his desk in the front east room, which was the library of the mansion. Scarcely sun-up when we find him thus, his soldierly form slouched in an easy chair, his face twisted with pain and worry, one swathed foot resting upon a pillow-topped hassock. For high living had exacted its penalty, and the twin devils gout and dyspepsia had well-nigh driven Colonel Shad crazy, as they had robbed him of all peace.

Crushing the newspaper which he had been reading and giving a wordless snarl of rage, the master seized his crook-handled cane and thumped viciously upon the floor. Followed the hurried shuffling of feet, and a white-headed negro appeared in the doorway.

“Yas’r, boss? Yas’r?”

"Where's that boy of mine?"

"'Pears lak he ain't done riz yit, suh——"

"Not up? Then get him up! Tell him to come here at once."

"Yas'r, boss—'bleege to yo'!"

"Sime!"—as the darky turned to go—"what time did that young fellow get in last night? I didn't hear him, and I should have, for it was damn little sleep I got."

"He come in de back do', suh, an' please yo'," replied Sime, cautiously.

"*What time?*" thundered Colonel Shad, bringing his stick down on the floor and glaring at his body-servant.

"Yes'r, boss! De chickens 's crowin', suh——"

"For midnight or for day? Don't dare lie to me! I know you'd take a beating for that young man, but——"

He stopped, writhed in his chair, then sank his forehead to his hand.

"Midnight or daylight, Sime?" he repeated, wearily.

"Dey 's crowin' fo' de mawnin,' Marse Kuhn'l."

Silence in the big, square room. The snowy curtains at the windows blew gently inward, and rippled back soundlessly to the embrasured casements. In the plum tree without a joyous catbird was welcoming the sun.

Colonel Shad raised his head. The fire had faded from his gray eyes, and his lids looked heavy. He gazed straight at the old darky and asked, quietly:

"Was he drunk?"

Sime's hands were gripped in front of him, and his head was bowed. His answer was low and thick, but the listening ears were keen.

"I holp 'im up de stairs, suh, 'n' tuk he clo'es



off. He 'peared kin' o' tah'd 'n' let down, lak he'd been ridin' atter de fox, maybe."

"Yes, he's after a vixen, Sime, and he's been roistering again up at Hillsboro. Go wake him, and tell him to come to me at once."

Motionless, except for a rigor now and then begotten by a twinge from his swollen toe, the master sat gazing out the window and down the broad lawn till his vision caught the majestic sweep of the river. This view had been an antidote for all lesser worries in days gone by, but now its customary effect failed the irascible, broken old man. Within the past six months a great change had come upon him. Accustomed to life in the open, when failing health, accompanied by tormenting aches, chained him to the house his nerve gave down. His wonted jovial, though somewhat brusque manner changed to petulance, and he was often like a peevish child. Of later weeks a hobby had possessed him. For a number of days in succession the newspapers had printed the record of several unfortunate marriages, and Colonel Shad had all at once leaped to the conclusion that the present generation was decadent and of no value to society whatever. It was nothing but the vagary of a sick mind, but it was distressingly real to the man who cherished it, and it became so that he would search the columns of the daily press for stories of faithless wives and runaway girls. His morbid interest in these matters was heightened by the fact that he was rich, in wretched health, and had an only son strongly inclined toward the company of the opposite sex. The fear that this son would be roped in by some rosy-faced wayside wench had grown upon him until it completely engrossed him. He had brooded upon the subject hour after hour, striving be-

tween gout-pains to find some way out of his manufactured trouble. At length he had hit upon a plan—a cruel plan, indeed, and unworthy of a father who loved his son. And Shadrach Brentley loved Saul, the child whom his lost Clarissa had borne.

Yes, he was a boy to be proud of. The master admitted that to his inner consciousness. A bit wayward, forsooth, a little too fond of tarrying at roadside inns, but the slaves worshipped him, and Aunt Emmeline's eyes had a trick of turning moist whenever she watched him swing to the back of his big bay horse and go galloping away. "Too good for the company he keeps!" she would murmur; "but where could company be found his equal? Maybe at the court of kings!" And this doting, foolish maiden aunt, the Colonel's sister, who kept the domestic machinery running smoothly at the mansion, would dab each pale, patrician lid with a wad of linen and lace and lavender, and turn to her duties with a little sigh.

A boy to be proud of. A thirty-year-old boy, it is true, standing six-foot-three in his socks. Colonel Shad mused on and on, and lo! after a while the ugly lines which many agonizing moments had ruthlessly cut upon his features seemed to melt away, and in their place bloomed a sweet smile. He had firmly resolved to hurt Clarissa's son, but it was for the boy's good. In childhood days he had used the rod once in a while, pinning his faith to the clearly expressed dictum of a certain wise man of old. And now he would save the young man, though the treatment were heroic. But what he conceived to be his duty he would never shirk, though his own heart broke in executing it. The master did not know that his mind was ill as well as his body. In other days he would have

spoken to Emmeline of so momentous a proceeding, but this plan which he had developed had been carefully locked away in his breast; had been shielded with that peculiar cunning which often attaches to a mind not entirely well.

Enter now Saul Brentley, half dressed, half awake, his smooth face glowing from the towel which had followed the cold water; his eyes opening and closing laboriously, his light brown hair tumbling over his forehead.

"Mercy, dad!" he grumbled, his lips twisted to a rueful smile. "What on earth 's the stew? I could 'a' killed that nigger o' yours!"

Standing straddle-legged in the middle of the floor, he doubled his fists, flexed his arms, then shot them out and up with a prodigious yawn.

"Looks like a gladiator!" shot through the father's mind. Aloud: "Sit down, Saul."

With wonted thoughtfulness the young man came forward and returned to the Colonel's lap the paper which had fallen to the floor. Then he dropped in a careless attitude on the arm of a heavy chair and saddled his clamped fingers across one updrawn knee.

"How are you feeling this morning?" he asked, pleasantly, after a few moments of silence, which the Colonel had occupied in staring grimly at his bound-up foot.

"Dev'lish! *Hellish!* My body is tortured and my mind is tormented——" He broke off suddenly to turn his gaze full on his son. "I had hoped, Saul, that you would settle down before I was out of the way."

Saul began to flip the heel of the slipper on his suspended foot up and down with his toes. He also found it convenient to watch this pastime,

while an old-fashioned blush settled on his cheeks and temples. At last:

"I guess Sime told you——"

"Not until I compelled him. He is loyal to you, and tried to mitigate the incident."

"It isn't often I do that way," replied the son; "and of course I regret it later. I got in with the boys, and you know a fellow can't be a prig."

Colonel Shad's long, white fingers slipped under the edge of the newspaper as he said:

"I don't condemn you for these occasional sprees, Saul, much as I deplore them. Work on the place has gone forward most satisfactorily under your supervision since I was compelled to give it up, and I gladly grant you full credit for this. But there is another matter which annoys me, which has harassed me to the point of exasperation."

His thin, aristocratic face became convulsed with pain, and he drew one shoulder up.

"This damned gout is killing me!" he hissed between clenched teeth. "That foot 'd come off if I had my way!"

Saul's face clouded in quick sympathy.

"It's a shame, dad, for you to suffer like that. But Doctor Van Wyck tells me he thinks the worst of this attack is over."

"Van Wyck's a plain Dutch fool!" stormed Colonel Shad, dropping his head back to its cushioned rest and breathing heavily. "It's like knives and needles," he whispered.

Young Brentley slid down into the chair and waited, legs extended and feet crossed.

The old man's eyes had fallen shut, and his son regarded him with a steadfast, searching scrutiny. Undoubtedly he was breaking. His frame was more attenuated, his cheeks were thinner, and the

slight puffiness under each eye had a bluish tinge.

"Another matter," repeated the Colonel, very suddenly, again leveling his gaze at his son. "You know, of course, the extent of this plantation, and its approximate value. You also have an intimate knowledge of my financial affairs, and are aware that, for this section of the state, I am considered rich. All of this, naturally, will revert to you at my death, with the exception of a suitable provision for my sister, who is wholly dependent."

Saul inclined his head slightly, and replied in a peculiarly changed, softened voice:

"Aunt Emmeline should never want as long as I lived, sir."

The Colonel swallowed, ran his mustaches rapidly between finger and thumb, and continued after clearing his throat.

"The mutual affection existing between you is well known to me, and is, I must say, beautiful. But it is possible that in after years some external influence might be brought to bear which would alienate you from your aunt."

"I don't think I understand," said Saul. "At present I cannot imagine such a condition."

The wraith of a smile touched the Colonel's lips, and was gone.

"We are approaching the possibility, my boy. It is useless for me to tell you that there never has been a mesalliance in our family's history. This knowledge constituted part of your rearing, and it has been too deeply instilled for you to forget it. Now tales have come to me of a certain sly wench, Jinsy by name, who serves in the tap-room of McClair's tavern on the Hillsboro road. And the stories I hear link her name with the name of a blue-blooded gentleman, Saul Brentley. Have I been misinformed?"

A second and deeper blush dyed the young fellow's cheeks as he answered, steadily:

"What have you heard, dad? You know you'll get the truth from me."

A quick look of pride dawned and faded on Colonel Shad's face at the last sentence.

"It has come to me, Saul, that you are with her often, frequently at night, and alone. If these things are true, they point to but one conclusion. I would be glad if you would tell me your exact relation to this—person."

Now the heir to the Brentley acres and the Brentley fortune moved uncomfortably in his seat, and felt for his pipe. Not having his coat on, he failed to find it. So he thrust his hands in his trousers' pockets, and answered:

"She's a wonderfully pretty girl, dad, with the most fetching mannerisms you ever saw. She's been at McClair's only a few months—came from some western county, and is some sort of half-cousin or other to old Sandy. I stopped one hot day for a mug of ale. I was in a hurry, and didn't get down. She brought the foaming cup to my saddle, and I could scarcely drink for surprise. She smiled at me and, sir, I'm no hooded monk; I smiled back. One thing's led to another. I'm in love with the jade, dad; I've kissed her and told her so. I've no intention of marrying her. That's the truth; all of it."

"It seems quite enough."

Keen and cold the words came, and Colonel Shad's eyes were hard and bright.

"Will you kindly tell me what are your intentions, then?" he continued.

Saul rubbed one knee against the other.

"Why, as to that, I don't know that I have

any!" he exclaimed, lifting eyes of honest gray in a straightforward look.

"There can be but two possible conclusions to an affair of this kind"—the father's voice had grown metallic—"marriage or disgrace. Either would be intolerable to me, and I should think a sense of your position as my son would render each out of the question for you."

"I've no idea of allowing either," replied Saul, a little doggedly, beginning to frown. "I don't suppose you ever——"

Colonel Shad's fist crashed down on the lid of his writing desk.

"No impudence, sir!" he thundered. "I've brought you here this morning to have an understanding, not to be hectored. I know your hot-headed blood. You got it from me, and I'm willing to make allowances, but I'm damned if a bar-wench shall be mistress of this estate, nor shall my son and heir appear in a court of law to defend a bastardy suit. You must promise me to leave the girl alone henceforth. . . . Your word is enough," he added, in milder tones, as the young man got up swiftly and walked with clenched fists and scowling forehead to one of the broad windows.

"What if I refuse?" he asked, his voice low and thick.

"Everything will go to your aunt."

"Can Jorkins run the plantation?"

"What do you mean?"

"Simply that if I yield to your demand I must get away."

"Good God!" muttered Colonel Shad. "Has it gone that far?"

The tall figure at the window wheeled with squared jaws.

"You've been there!" retorted Saul, an open note of defiance ringing through his words. "I've heard it all. What did you do when your plebeian Venus stretched you her arms and held up her lips?"

A quick spasm of pain and rage shook the old man in the chair, and he lifted his cane as though to cast it, but the next instant he groaned, collapsed and fell back, breathing hard.

A moment later the boy had one of the thin, nervous hands in both his own, and was bending over it in contrition.

"Forgive me, dad; forgive me! I'm sorry. I licked the villain who repeated to me the tale, and told him he lied. And he did. It was cruel and wrong for me to speak that way to you, and I beg your pardon. But"—he sank on one knee and bowed his head till his face was hidden—"I love Jinsy so I can't see any future without her!"

Presently the Colonel spoke.

"I think Jorkins can manage for six months. He's had good training. Another thing now, my boy, and that quickly, for this interview has proven too much. Wherever you go, promise me this: that you will marry *no* woman until you have my consent."

There followed a long, long silence in the oak-panelled room.

Then Saul Brentley got upon his feet and stood before his sire. A sort of understanding had come to him. This was not the father of his youth and early manhood. This was a sick, querulous old man with a hobby, which must be humored.

"They're hard terms, dad, for a fellow with red blood in him, but I'll try them. There's my hand on it."

II

Telling of a farewell by a certain woodland spring, and of a vow as rash as that of Jephthah.

Aunt Emmeline, a spare little lady of immaculate appearance, readily noted the perturbed manner of her idol when he made his entrance into the breakfast room a half hour later. She was busy with a bowl of violets at the huge mahogany sideboard when she heard his step, but a glance at his ruffled countenance sent her fluttering to the coffee urn, where her spiritually slender fingers engaged themselves in his interest.

Saul returned her sprightly greeting mechanically, and sat staring at the table-cloth.

"What is it, nevvew?" chirped the old lady, in earnest solicitude, her corkscrew ringlets bobbing at her ears. "Didn't you sleep well, or did Shadrach get you up too soon? I was surprised at him, sending for you at such an early hour."

She held a laden sugar-spoon poised delicately over her cup, and beamed her adoration.

Saul sighed, shook himself together, and began to carve the meat.

"I'm going away, Aunt Emmy," he said.

"Going away! This time of the year?"

The bird-like hand came down to the edge of the table, and the bowl of the spoon rested upon the saucer's rim.

"Yes'm."

"Where, pray?"

"I don't know."

The spinster gasped, then slowly cascaded the sugar into her tea.

"Has your early call upon Shadrach anything to do with this sudden determination?"

"Everything."

"And you had not given it a thought until you had seen him?"

"No'm."

Aunt Emmeline lifted a tight-lipped, flashing visage to the black-faced, white-coated image standing behind Saul's chair.

"Jupe, go to the kitchen. I'll ring if I want you."

Jupe ducked and vanished.

Instantly it seemed as though a magic hand had passed over Aunt Emmeline's face, for the stern lineaments which had sent the servant scuttling away turned at once into features holding a tender, pathetic beauty.

"Nevvew, I hope you will speak quite plainly to me," she said, gently.

Saul fidgeted, and gulped his hot coffee.

"As you know, Shadrach is not himself," the caressing voice went on. "He has suffered so much I really think his mind is affected, at times. You have not—have not—quarrelled, nevview?"

There was a perceptible catch in the last sentence, and the young man raised his eyes.

"A sort of quarrel, yes; but we parted in full understanding."

"As friends?—Good friends? As father and son should?"

Followed a clicking and clacking of knife and fork on china from Saul's end of the table, and a more refined, barely audible clink now and then from Aunt Emmeline's. The spinster's favorite cat took this occasion to leap into her lap, where,

purring, she rubbed a silken side against the childless bosom, and waved a curling tail against the white, sharp chin. The fuzzy tail-tip tickled, and Aunt Emmeline calmly brushed it down. She sipped a few drops of tea, found it too sweet, and poured more into the cup.

Saul finished eating, pushed his plate back, and folding his arms looked across at the dainty old lady he truly loved.

"I don't think dad has treated me exactly right, but throughout I have tried to keep in mind he is my father, and to remember his state of health. But it seems to me he is interfering unwarrantably in my affairs. He forgets that he was thirty once."

The bright eyes watching him saw his temples tinge abruptly, and the acute mind back of the bright eyes at once scented romance.

"If you care to tell me about it, nevvew, I shall respect your confidence. Shadrach is not dissatisfied with your management?"

"Oh, no!" with a slight gesture of dismissal.

"He realizes that young men must—er—get in late some nights?"

"Yes, he's reasonable enough on those points."

"Then, nevvew, it must be a—a——"

"A girl, Aunt Emmy! Say it!"

"I can't think of any of our neighbors' daughters to whom he could in reason object. There's Judge Bunker's Sallie and——"

But Saul was on his feet.

"Good heaven! Hush, Aunt Emmy, and let me tell you. You may side with dad, but it's my opinion that when people's blood gets too infernally blue it's liable to turn black. It needs an occasional infusion of the common, healthy red

variety to keep life in it. Anyway, here is how matters stand with me."

Then he told her of his interview with his father, and the latter's hard demand. With the air of one who had been abused he told it, the inevitable arrogance of headstrong youth embittering his quick words, and the memory of the winsome waiting-maid at McClair's tavern heating his blood in rebellion.

Aunt Emmeline listened to the tale with a very proper demeanor, alternately stroking the cat and sipping her third cup of tea.

"Now what would you have done, in mercy's name?" concluded the wrathful Saul, taking a position directly beside the diminutive spinster, and hurling the question at her defiantly.

"A most difficult problem, nevvew, I must agree," evaded Aunt Emmeline.

"Do you blame me?" pursued young Brentley. "I want to know what you think."

"I must say I would deplore any entanglement of this sort," was the dignified reply. "A young man of your birth, and blood, and prospects, should seek a wife among the very highest circles. A mesalliance would kill Shadrach, and would, I think, break my heart too."

Saul wheeled abruptly, walked the length of the room and back again.

"Would you and dad have me marry some aristocratic snob with indigo water in her veins instead of blood, and be miserable the rest of my life?—sacrifice myself to your family gods?"

His voice had fallen, but now a hard, stubborn note rang through it.

"I shouldn't put it that way, nevvew. The elect are not necessarily anemic. Much as I dislike to

take sides against you, it seems to me that you are making a mistake."

"Very well, Aunt Emmy. But I had hoped for sympathy from you, at least. I have promised dad not to marry without his knowledge and consent. To keep my word, I am going away."

"When?"

"To-night."

Aunt Emmeline quietly placed the cat upon the floor, arose, and put a vein-marked hand upon the young man's arm.

"Why did you allow yourself to get in this entanglement, my boy?" she asked, her voice unsteady.

Saul made no response to the caress.

"It's not an entanglement," he replied. "Don't be deceived. I'm simply in love with the girl, and she says that she loves me. An ordinary, everyday occurrence; nothing to wonder about."

"But your family!—did you have no thought of us?"

"To be candid—no."

Aunt Emmeline's suspiciously white, even teeth clamped her lip for a moment. Then:

"I'm very sorry," she said, quite low, and turned away.

Saul did not see the tears which rolled from her eyes an instant later. Had he seen, most probably he would not have cared, for his heart was sore.

Presently he was sitting at his desk in his room, pen in hand. For a moment only he thought, with the staff poised. Then, firmly, he wrote these words:

"Dearest Jinsy:

Meet me at the spring in the hollow,
under the big beech, at four o'clock. I
will be busy till then. It's to say good-
bye, so don't fail me.

Saul."

This he despatched at once by his body-servant. The remainder of the forenoon was spent in attending to some delayed correspondence, and in packing up. A thought struck him as his man, after carefully brushing and folding a fashionably cut suit, was preparing to place it in the trunk already nearly full.

"Hold on, Abe!"

Saul spoke shortly from where he sat on the edge of the bed.

"Yas'r, marse.—Ain't yo' gwi take *dis*?"

The darky held the garment up before him in wide-eyed incredulity.

The young master did not reply at once. A far-away look had come to his eyes and the faintest smile to his lips. He appeared to be musing on pleasant things. The moments passed in silence, Abe standing mystified with the wonderful suit extended in front of him, and Saul gazing straight through the wall of the house into the future.

"What time is the moon up?" he asked, speaking as one half tranced.

Abe darted him a swift look of suspicion. What ailed young marse?

"'Bout sundown, suh."

"Then put all that frumpery back where it belongs. Instead, get plenty of clean linen, my hunting and working clothes, and roll them and strap them as tightly as you can. Then make a second

bundle with food in it—all the cold stuff you can find. Leave them both on the floor here where I can get them. And Abe, look here.” He stood erect and leveled his forefinger at the open-mouthed slave. “Don’t say a word about this. I’m coming back in a few months, and if you blab——” Giving a warning nod, the speaker left the room.

After a dinner where conversation was limited to the necessary questions and answers, Saul got a-horse, and in company with Jorkins made a quick tour of the estate. He explained to the overseer that unexpected business called him away, and that he must shift the management entirely until he returned. If Jorkins smelt a mouse he gave no sign, but promised in quiet tones to do his best with the farm. He was a steady, reliable man past middle age, and was entirely capable of coping single-handed with the task now given him.

It was nearly four o’clock when Saul swung out on the turnpike leading to Hillsboro. Down this highway he had come galloping in the early gray of morning a few hours before, swaying in his saddle from all-night merrymaking with some neighborhood blades, thinking not once of the doom that waited him at his journey’s end. He wondered with some vexation who had been meddling in his affairs? Who could have taken Colonel Shad the story of his infatuation with the rarest girl the countryside had ever seen? “But,” he argued to himself, “such things can’t be hidden. One can hide murder, theft and arson, but let a girl and a man smile upon each other twice, and the whole community is buzzing. No use to worry about that. But the thing which does worry me is—how will this tryst end?”

He gently touched with his spur the ribs beneath it, and the bay stretched out toward the tavern three miles away.

In due time our hero, beset by various emotions, chiefest of which was a wild desire to feel a warm, soft body in his arms, came to a by-road, down which he dashed. Pursuing this a quarter of a mile, he drew up, flung himself from the saddle, and casting his bridle-rein over a stake in the rail fence, climbed it an instant later. A hillside covered with green sod stretched down to a valley beneath, which was fringed with trees. Toward a certain spreading beech the young man bent his steps, his face aglow and his eyes flashing. For so, vigorous youth always goes to meet its love.

Presently he saw her through the screening leaves, standing pensively by a rock-walled basin where the crystal water of a never failing spring bubbled out from the hill's deep heart. Then for a moment he tarried, a-tiptoe with feeling, his hands clenched and his sturdy chest heaving. Charming indeed she looked in the semi-gloom of that cool retreat; a trifle heavy of figure, maybe, for classic beauty; her black hair curling about her milky neck, her head bent, her hands clasped lonesomely. Then suddenly, beneath the ardent gaze of her lover she stirred, lifted her head, and saw him.

With a low cry he leaped forward and caught her to him. Then for a while was heard only the murmur of the tiny stream, kisses which rapidly merged into a long, soundless caress, while overhead a crested cardinal sang madly of the joys of Spring.

"Oh, Saul!"

"My Jinsy!"

Arms strained anew at neck and waist, and the

girl's lips hurt under the fervor of his. Then her head fell beneath his chin, and a tremor swept her.

"Oh, Saul!" she said again, and the last word was a sob.

"Don't!" he pleaded, putting his broad palm on her cheek and pressing her closer to him.

"Is it true? . . . What did you mean? . . . To say goodbye!"

"Will you promise to be very brave if I tell you? It is hard to say?"

Thereat she drew back from him as far as his encircling arms would allow, and lifted eyes of suspicion and dread; black eyes where strange gleams battled with the love-light.

"What do you mean? What has happened? Don't you care any more?"

Fear had crept to her face, and back of this was the shadow of desperation.

"You are the only girl I have ever loved!" he told her, and the passion in his words was too plain for her to doubt. "I have not changed," he added, taking her hands in his and searching her eyes, "but something has occurred which makes it necessary that I should leave you for a time. Is your love strong enough to stand a few months' separation?"

Steadily he held her gaze, and her lids drooped.

"I am yours, now and always," she replied then, in submissive tones. "I am strong; tell me what has come about."

At the base of the beech tree the twisted roots, partly above ground, had formed a gentle depression large enough for two, providing these two be man and maid, and providing further that they love. Here, then, Saul led Jinsy, and seated here, his arm around her waist, he told her of Colonel

Shad's morning summons, and of the consequences resulting therefrom. Carefully but truthfully he recounted the interview, watching askance the maid's profile all the while to see, if he might, how she was receiving it. He dwelt with emphasis upon the Colonel's failing health, how bodily suffering naturally and necessarily reflects upon the mind, and endeavored to put his father's side of the question before her in the best light he could. When he ceased talking——

"What did he say about me?" demanded Jinsy, her brow dark.

"He don't know you," parried Saul.

She flashed a look at him.

"He knows about me, and who I am—a waiting-girl in a roadside tavern!"

Saul squirmed, and recrossed his extended legs.

"Did he call me a wench—or something?" defiantly.

"He didn't call you a wench," fibbed Saul.

"He thinks I should marry some one else."

"Who?"

"Lord knows! Somebody of his own choosing. He had no candidate ready."

"He simply couldn't see a Brentley wed a nameless person who hands out punch and ale to high and low alike. And you agreed to this?"

Saul twisted about till he faced her squarely.

"Tell me, pray, what would have happened had I remained stubborn? I would have been cast penniless into the world to make my own way. You don't know Colonel Shad! He would have thrown me out as surely as we sit here. How would we have fared then, you and I? Would you have me sit sodden in the ingle of your tap-room? Would you be wedded to a luckless wastrel? I am a gentleman, Jinsy. I was born to

command, and not to serve. Should dad forsake me now, I would become a rake!"

Something in his impetuous manner and fiery speech caused a reaction in the mind of the girl. Her big black eyes dimmed, and with a short, shivering sob she threw her arms around his neck and pulled him to her.

"I was afraid that you was just tired of me and was tryin' to get away!" she confessed. "Forgive me, Saul; but—but—I love you so!"

He returned the pressure of her arms, and his face grew tender.

"Tired of you?" he repeated, wonderingly. "Does one grow tired of the sunlight, the air and the birds? You are much more than all of these. And how could I grow tired when our meetings are so brief?"

She nestled closer to him with a little sigh, and mutely reaching up one hand, burrowed her fingers beneath the collar of his shirt, so that they rested against his neck.

His head fell forward until his lips rested upon her hair. From it came a faint odor suggestive of violets, and as a blissful ecstasy stole upon him Saul closed his eyes.

For a long, long time they sat thus, bulwarked from the outside world by the walls of the ravine, each content in the realization that the other's love was true. So long they sat, in truth, that gray-brown shadows crept upon them as the sun withdrew, and these, in turn, were transformed into a pearly radiance as the moon came up. Perchance they had fallen asleep thus in each other's arms, for all doubt had vanished and a sweet peace had come upon them. And first love has a way of mocking time; of turning hours into minute lengths. Had they slept, or had they remained

awake, neither was surprised when they saw the moon push its yellow sphere over the crest of a hill.

"I am so happy!" murmured the girl, never moving.

"I could stay thus forever!" whispered back the man.

"But you must go!" from the girl, an echo of pain in her words.

"After a while," answered the man, in the same undertone.

"Where to, sweet?"

"God knows, dear heart!"

"Haven't you planned?"

"My destination?"—No."

"But you leave to-night?"

"Yes; soon."

"You will let me know?"

"What?"

"When you get there. You will write?"

"Oh, yes!"

The moon crept up another foot, and at the base of the old beech youth called to youth with dumb intensity. Then there was the sound of labored breathing, and of lips torn from lips in an agony of passion.

Saul awoke first, and wrenched himself from the white, strong arms which held him.

"Jinsy! For God's sake!" he panted. "This won't do! Try to be calm. Remember, Love betrays its worshippers sometimes!"

His own form was shaking pitifully as he sat a short distance from her and spoke so plainly in the desperation of the moment.

She leaned forward on her palms, her hair partly fallen where loosened pins had let it slip, breathing deeply between her full lips, which were

slightly apart. Her eyes, aflood with moonlight, searched his face in a kind of desperate stare.

"If I thought," she muttered, almost as if to herself; "if I thought it took that to hold you, Saul, I believe—they say I have gypsy blood," she broke off abruptly, "and a gypsy girl stops at nothing to hold her lover!"

She began to draw herself toward him over the ground, never taking her eyes from his.

"Don't, Jinsy!" he cried, and with an heroic effort of will leaped to his feet.

Instantly she was up, and before he could surmise her intention had clasped his face with her hands, and tiptoeing gazed deep into his eyes.

"Promise me that you will come back to me!" she said. "No matter what happens. Six months from to-night, when the leaves of this tree are browning under the breath of frost, meet me here again! Promise, Saul!"

"I will come," he said, but he did not lift the arms at his sides.

"Hold me close once more!" she continued. "Don't be afraid!"

So once more he crushed her to his breast, and with the fire from her hot lips dulling his wits and judgment, spoke rashly in her ear.

"I swear I will come back to you; I will love none but you; I will marry none but you!"

Then presently he was walking up the grassy hillside in the moonlight, and Jinsy, after staring at his retreating figure a few moments with heaving bosom, turned toward the tap-room in which she served as waiting-maid.

III

Recording other leave-takings: friendly, stormy, tender, and launching Saul upon his adventure.

"Young marse!"

"Yes, Abe."

Reaching home, Saul had turned his horse over to his servant and started indoors. The negro's voice indicated worry.

"I'd lak to hab speech wid you, suh."

The young master turned about slowly.

"Well, say what you want to, but be quick."

"Yes'r. Dey's goin's-on in dah, suh!"

He shook his head toward the dimly lighted front of the mansion.

"What do you mean? What has happened since I left?"

Saul came closer, placing one hand on the neck of his horse.

"Dey's been a combustication o' some sort 'r t'other in de Kuhn'l's room, suh. You see, hit come dis way. Atter you put out wid Marse Jawkins 'n' I'd laid back dem fine clo'es, I goes to wuk 'n' made up de two bundles lak you tol' me. No sooner 'd I got 'em stropped, 'n' laid side by side on de flo', lak you tol' me, dan in come Miss Em'line. She 'low to me: 'Whut dem fixin's fo', Aberham?' I tol' 'er dey's yo' orders, suh. 'But he's gwi way dis ebenin'!' she 'lows. 'Yas'm, Miss Em'line,' I 'sponds; 'dat's a fac'.' 'Den why ain't you packin' 'is trunks 'stid o' foolin' wid dat trash?' she 'lows. 'Kase he ain't gwi tek

no trunks,' says I. Wid dat she flung up her han's in dat way o' her'n, 'n' gaped. 'Aberham,' she says, lookin' at me stiddy 'n' talkin' kin' o' low lak, 'wah's yo' master gwi?' 'Fo' Gawd, Miss Em'line,' says I, 'I don't know!' Den she axed all I knowed, which 's mighty nigh nothin', 'n' fus' think I know she got to miratin' roun' dat room a-sniffin' 'n' a-wipin' her eyes 'n' a-talkin' to herseff. So I crope out 'n' got away, 'kase Miss Em'line ac' lak she wuzn't zackly right in 'er min', suh, sho!"

The darky's excited tones ceased and he began to mutter to himself, and stroke the horse's forelock.

Saul waited a moment, a thrill of affection for the stern old lady sweeping over him. Then——

"What has all that to do with the trouble in Colonel Shad's room?"

"Miss Em'line went right dah, suh, atter she lef' yo' room, 'n' dey had some wuds!"

"How do you know this, Abe? Have you been spying?"

"I's passin' troo de hall, young marse, 'n' I heard some wuds from de Kuhn'l's room. Sime's dah, waitin', ez he allus is, fo' de Kuhn'l's knock, 'n' I kin o' stop to tell Sime's how you 's goin' way fo' a spell, 'n' fus' thing you know we's bofe standin' dah a-listenin'."

"That was wrong, Abe, and you know it."

"Ef 't hadn't been you's de cause o' de rumpus, young marse, I wouldn't 'a' stayed. But I heerd yo' name, 'n' dey's 'scussin' you."

A picture of humility, the negro stood with bent head, kicking his bare heel with his toe.

"If there is more to tell, say it. I haven't much time to give you."

"Miss Em'line's raidin' de Kuhn'l fo' sendin'

you 'way. She 'lowed hit 's a shame, you bein' de only chil'n; den de Kuhn'l got mad 'n' hollered 'n' cussed, 'n' atter a while Miss Em'line she dashed out o' dah 'n' run to her room, payin' no mo' min' to me 'n' Sime 'n if we'd been posts. . . . Dey's sho been goin's-on, young marse."

Abe shook his head again, and smoothed the horse's nose.

For a short time Saul said nothing. He was debating whether to leave at once, or to tell his father good-bye. The former course would have been far easier, for a return to the Colonel's presence now could not possibly restore harmony between them. On the other hand he owed his sire the courtesy of a farewell, and presently duty triumphed.

"Put the horse up," he said, kindly, "then bring the two bundles from my room and place them on the bottom step here. And Abe, look after the Colonel when I am gone. Sime is getting old and is not as watchful as he should be. Listen, boy, and keep this a secret!" Saul put his hand on the bondman's shoulder and leaned toward him. "You know that I have been good to you, and I believe that you love me. I am going to tell you something which no one else shall know, and I charge you now never to repeat it. I am leaving by the river, Abe, within an hour; maybe sooner. I do not know just where I shall stop, for I am going adventuring. But if anything should happen to the Colonel—if he should grow worse, or need me badly, hunt for me until you find me. I shall be somewhere near the river, though maybe seventy-five miles away. Do you understand, and do you promise? Can I depend upon you, as I have always done before?"

Before Saul had finished, the loyal negro was blubbering in his sleeve.

"I don't want you to go 'way, young marse!" he snuffled.

"Thank you, Abe. I know I can depend upon you now. But I must go, and tonight. Remember what I've told you. Watch the Colonel, and find me if I am needed."

"Yas'r, I will! 'Fo' Gawd, suh, I'll do dat!"

"Now good-bye. Put the horse up, bring my bundles here, and go to bed. I shan't need you again."

The young master thrust out his hand, and the black gripped it with almost a detaining pressure.

"I'll fin' you, suh!" he whispered. "Dey ain't nothin' gwi keep Abe frum findin' you ef de time come. All I wush is dat you 's tek'n' me wid you. . . . Good-bye, young marse, 'n' de Lawd be good to you!"

Servant and horse disappeared on the way to the stables.

Then Saul turned and walked with a steady stride up the flight of hewn stone steps to the porch. He passed at once into the broad hall, which was lighted by an ornamental hanging lamp with many glass pendants, and nodding to his father's aged servitor who sat in waiting at his left, knocked at a door. In response to an inarticulate sound from within, he entered.

A shaded lamp, lighted but turned low, hung from the ceiling, but it was a student's lamp on the Colonel's desk which drew Saul's eye. For his father sat there writing, his quill scratching noisily at the bottom of a rather lengthy page of script. He did not look up to see who his caller was, and Saul remained just within the door, re-

spectfully keeping silent until his sire finished his task, or saw fit to recognize his presence.

Very soon the old gentleman cast his quill aside with an exclamation which might have been a grunt or a snarl, and, with the assistance of his cane, settled himself afresh in his cushioned chair. Not once did he look toward the door, but as he began nervously to roll a cigarette from materials at his elbow, spoke rapidly.

"I'm expecting you; have been all day."

Saul had never seen a blacker mood possess his father, and the presence of a tray on the center table holding decanter and glasses and a bowl of mint gave mute evidence that Colonel Shad had been imbibing.

"Yes, sir; I'm here," he replied, carefully holding his voice to respectful accents.

"I looked for you later in the morning. There are things to talk over. Where were you?"

"In my room. I had some writing to do, and the packing had to be attended to."

"I also anticipated your calling upon me this afternoon," continued the merciless voice. "Where were you then?"

Now the watching eyes of the young man saw a sardonic smile play over the features of his inquisitor, and he knew at once whither the catechising was trending. Colonel Shad had already guessed where a portion of his day had been spent, and with studied cruelty was going to make him confess it. But it was all one now to Saul.

"Until four o'clock I was with Jorkins, going over the plantation. There were a number of things I wished to show him; I consulted with him about others."

Colonel Shad deliberately struck a lucifer, and as it glowed and fumed between finger and thumb,

he grinned with a peculiar curl of one corner of his lip, which showed his teeth.

"Until four o'clock——" he repeated, mockingly, and bringing the cigarette to his lips, touched fire to it.

Saul had not moved from his tracks. A great change had occurred in his father's mental condition since morning, bad as it had been then. Chained to his chair, the sick man had brooded all day; had, contrary to his doctor's orders, been drinking whiskey; and, to crown all else, had lately undergone a stormy interview with his sister, who doubtless had reproached him warmly for his attitude toward his only son. When he entered the room Saul had been prepared for harsh words, and an unbending determination on the part of the Colonel, but he had not counted upon what he was receiving, and was yet to receive. Making all allowance possible, there was that in the young man which caused his cheeks to burn and his jaws set at the insolent manner in which this second interview was being conducted. He would not equivocate and he would not lie, but he would finish and go as quickly as possible.

Colonel Shad shot a lengthening funnel of smoke from his lips.

"And where were you after four o'clock?" he asked, simulating a sweetness of tone almost effeminate.

"I was with Jinsy until a very short time ago."

The reply came without a moment's hesitation.

There was no explosion from the Colonel, but Saul scarcely looked for it now. Colonel Shad's mood was far more dangerous than it had been that morning. He had batted his anger down, and it was working havoc in his brain.

"I see," he drawled, dawdling his cigarette be-

fore his face, "kissing and clipping; billing and cooing. Vows made which shall last throughout eternity, and such sweet rot. Well, I've heard of love in a cottage, but thank God I've never had to try it. I fancy it would grow deuced irksome with an empty larder and a cold hearth. Bright eyes dim, and red cheeks have a way of growing pale. Then, without money to bulwark them, our young lovers go to smash. But there'll be fools as long as there is a world; it takes fools to help round out a world.

"So our young gentleman, with an untarnished lineage of something like four hundred years, hies himself to a public place for a sweetheart and a mate. . . . By God, sir!" with a rapid change from ridiculing drawl to vigorous protest, "I say you're crazy!"

With that, for the first time, the speaker turned his head and glared at his son under lowered brows.

Saul did not answer. A fierce sort of combustion was seething in his breast, too; a mingling of indignation and shame, shame that a father should sink so low as his had done within the past few minutes. But he held his tongue, and remained standing with his arms hanging by his sides, his hat clenched in one hand.

"Damme! I say you're crazy!" reiterated the Colonel.

"Maybe I am, sir," replied Saul, a little wearily.

"I came to tell you good-bye," he added, a moment later, and advanced till he stood quite near his father's chair.

The old man frowned up with blinking eyes at the figure which towered beside him.

"Good-bye, eh?" he sneered. "And to beg

money, too, I suppose. You'll doubtless go where wine flows and cards are shuffled! But not a cent from me do you get! Not a cent! Do you hear?"

As he spoke he put one hand out to the sheet of closely written paper.

"You're mistaken, dad," answered Saul, still keeping himself in hand. "I'm not going to indulge in an orgy, and I have sufficient money for my needs. I simply came to say farewell as a matter of respect."

"Respect! Boundless respect you have shown me already in defying my wishes, and I care for no more of that brand. . . . Here; read that!"

He thrust the crackling paper up roughly.

Saul took it, found that he could not read the cramped and imperfect words in the subdued light, then walked over to a position under the swinging lamp and rapidly perused the writing.

"You want me to sign this?" he asked, in low tones, the hand which held the sheet trembling the least bit.

"Exactly!" came the emphatic response. "That's why I wrote it."

"You're making this business very hard on me, dad, and I believe you'll regret it some day. You're asking me to put my name to a statement which declares that I shall never willingly see Jinsy again."

"Just so!"

"Was not my solemn word that I would not marry her without your consent enough?"

"It was this morning. It is not this evening."

"Then I must say that this paper is not only unjust, but preposterous, and I refuse to sign it."

As he spoke, he placed it gently upon the center table.

Colonel Shad laughed, a high, falsetto, raucous

cackle, which had in it to the ears of his son an element of the unnatural and horrible. It might have come from an insane person, and Saul realized with a sinking heart the uselessness of staying longer.

Again he approached the desk, determining to end the futile scene.

"I hope you will believe me when I say I am sorry things have turned out this way. I will respect my former pledge to you, if that brings you any comfort. I hope you may soon grow better, and that Dr. Van Wyck will get you on your feet in time. Good-bye, dad."

Transferring his hat to his left hand, he held out his right.

Colonel Shad paid it no heed, but began to talk in a ruminative way, as though to himself, staring straight in front of him all the while.

"A gentleman's only son, whom he has reared carefully, and given every advantage, to desert him just at the time when he needs him for a staff and a comfort. His father sick and suffering and old, needing this son's help and advice, to be left to shift for himself, at the mercy of hired and slave labor. Had any one dared to say to me this would come to pass, I would have told him he lied——"

"Dad, won't you tell me good-bye?"

"And to-morrow my lawyer will come from Hillsboro to disinherit him. Tight and strong he will draw the papers, for the estate must be kept among people of blood. What if Sir John, who fell at Cressy, could look down the ages to this night of shame? My God! And my own son, my only begotten son, on whom I had relied. He chooses to be a wanderer instead of a landed gentleman."

With bowed head, Saul mutely turned and moved toward the door. The monotonous, meditative voice of his sire trailed after him.

"For infatuation of a pretty face he exiles himself; he, the last Brentley in Kentucky. For a kiss he abandons his helpless father and his home, and for the arms of a common jade he sacrifices his patrimony."

Saul passed from the room, but his slow steps brought no sound from the thick carpet, and snatches of sentences still came to his ears.

"To-morrow—tight and strong—common, alien—mix her blood—if Sir John—Cressy—shame—"

Sime looked up in mute, troubled inquiry from his post against the wall. Saul beckoned as he went by, and presently both stood on the portico. One of the double doors was closed, and the old darky had carefully drawn the other almost shut as he came out. Slouching up to Saul's side, he twisted his head askew and spoke in a fuzzy whisper:

"Yas'r, young marse?"

"You'd better get one of the boys to ride for the doctor to-night. The Colonel's sick—sicker than he's been for a long time. Say to the doctor that I sent for him, but caution him not to let dad know this. Hurry, now, and put Abe on a fast horse."

"Axin' yo' pahd'n, suh," ventured Sime, "I t'ink hit's de liquor. He's been hittin' it dat strong dis ebenin'."

"That's why I want Van Wyck—to keep him from taking more. Go, now, and get Abe started."

"Yas'r; sut'nly; 'bleege to you."

Alone, Saul Brentley did not tarry an instant. From where he stood he could see two bundles

lying on the bottom step, and in another moment he had one in each hand. Then, without a glance behind, he strode down the gradual decline to the murmuring river five hundred yards away. There was a barely perceptible path leading thither, and along this the young man hastened, the light from the risen moon bringing the familiar surroundings out with the greatest distinctness.

When scarcely half of the distance had been traversed, he heard the rhythmic thud of furiously racing feet, and a great white collie, yellow-maned, dashed to his side. Saul mechanically put his hand down to the cool nose, and continued his way, Roderick Dhu frisking beside him with an occasional whine of pleasure, and now and again making an upward leap of affection.

There was a boat landing on the bank of the river, beside an ancient sycamore, and on this man and dog presently stood. It was then sudden remembrance came to Saul. He should have told Aunt Emmy good-bye, after what had happened. She had dared Colonel Shad's wrath in his interest, and he was leaving without telling her of his appreciation. Brave little soul that she was! She relented after she thought it over, and had done her best to placate her brother. He could not leave her without a word of love.

Placing the bundles on the planking, he bade the dog remain and watch them, then started to go back. But even as he turned Aunt Emmy was standing there with a white knit shawl around her thin shoulders, and a veil over her head to keep off the dew. She held a package in her hand.

"Nevvew, were you going without a word to me?"

She spoke reproachfully as she drew near, but her voice was gentle, and somewhat unsteady.

"I've just had a trying talk with dad, Aunt Emmy," Saul replied, soberly, taking the package she offered him; "and I was so disturbed that I got this far before I thought of you. I was starting back when you came. . . . What's this?"

"Towels, soap, comb and brush. I'm sure Abraham left them out, and you'll need them. . . . Poor Shadrach seems to have gone demented," she added, gazing up at the large, square bulk of the mansion.

Saul put his arm around her and kissed her forehead.

"Abe told me of your attempts on my behalf," he said, "and I am touched more than I can say. It was very noble of you, Aunt Emmy, to do this for me when you disapproved of my course. I love you for it, and I shall always remember it."

As he spoke, the little spinster put her face against his breast, grasped his shoulder with one hand, and sobbed softly.

"You've always been sweet and good as a mother to me," continued Saul, "and while I must have taxed your patience at times, I cannot recall that you ever spoke harshly to me. And now this last proof of your affection has made me feel my great debt to you most keenly. I can never repay you, Aunt Emmy, but I shall always reverence you as the best woman I have ever known. . . . I have no recollection of mother."

For a few moments longer the slight figure shook in his arms, then with a deep breath Aunt Emmy straightened up.

"Thank you, nevvew," with a dignified effort at composure. "I knew your heart was true, though your head has led you into error. I have never seen Shadrach like this before, and I must lay the change to his malady. He will be better

to-morrow, and I hope will become normal again in time. If he does, and should want you, where——”

She stopped, and looked at the glinting water sliding past.

Saul did not answer. Bitter thoughts, and loyalty to this faithful woman, were warring within him. He had determined to efface himself utterly for the time he was away. But now Aunt Emmeline demanded to know where he was going, and he owed her much.

“If Shadrach should want you, nevvew!” she repeated, a hint of insistence sounding in the question.

“I have no destination,” he muttered, vaguely conscious that he must yield.

“But you cannot live on the river. You must stop somewhere.”

Saul gave in.

“I will write you, Aunt Emmy, in confidence.”

She patted his cheek tenderly.

“Bless you, my boy! Be careful, now, and let nothing happen to you. I’ve heard of robbers and brigands in other sections of the state. Don’t fall among them. And what does Shakespeare say? ‘To thine own self be true, and it will follow as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man.’ A beautiful sentiment, which we should all treasure. Now good-bye, nevvew. Let me hear from you as soon as you are located.”

A firm embrace, a kiss, and Aunt Emmeline was gone.

A minute later a boat holding a bareheaded man and a dog shot out to midstream, and turned its prow with the current.

IV

Revealing a dumfounding discovery which comes with the dawn, and introducing a philosopher and a bear.

By midnight Saul figured he had made thirty miles. The river, while not in flood, had been swollen recently by the Spring rains, and had not regained its normal flow. For the first two hours the man had rowed steadily, ceaselessly, and his powerful strokes had sent the light craft racing through the water. Much of an athlete, indeed, was young Brentley, for he had augmented his great natural strength by thorough and systematic training, and his muscles were practically tireless. This care of his physical being had been a rule from which he had not deviated since college days, and his occasional all-night sprees had left no apparent mark upon his splendid vitality.

As his boat swerved in obedience to his dipped oar and responded to the very perceptible tug of the current, Saul had cast a farewell glance at the mansion on the hill, the home which had sheltered him from infancy. He thought he saw a blur of white on the steps—a waved arm, but it may have been the moonlight deceiving him. He waved back, however, taking no chance of hurting the heart which had so plainly proven its devotion, knowing well that if it were indeed Aunt Emmy she would catch his signal. Then, ordering the collie to the stern and bidding him lie down, Saul

took the oars and braced himself for a long, lonely pull.

For perhaps five miles he knew the channel intimately. The mysterious, whispering river always had held a charm for him. He could not remember the time when he did not love it. His old black mammy, now dead, had often told him how she had taken him down to the landing when he was only a lusty baby, and he had crowed and shrieked his delight, and stretched his chubby arms in longing. Then within his own memory lurked the pleasing recollection of the days when, as a slender, straight-growing lad, he had raced eagerly to the grassy bank to anon plunge headlong into the waiting element. It seemed as if he had always known how to swim. No terror had ever hidden for him beneath the enchanting surface of the river. There was just happiness, recreation, companionship. But one cool Spring day when he ventured in too early the river had turned traitor to him; had cruelly seized him and cramped and twisted him, and drawn him down like some grim, silent monster. Lassie, Roderick Dhu's grandmother, lying upon the bank with head on paws and half-shut eyes, heard the short cry her master gave before he went down. On the instant she leaped, bravely and well, and seizing Saul by the hair as he arose the first time, towed him ashore.

Most of the Brentley estate lay up the river, and for that reason Saul's knowledge of its course in the opposite direction was limited. In like manner, the country toward which he was hastening was almost a strange land. His pursuits, activities and interests had always led him eastward. Toward the west the topography was rougher. This he knew from observation, for on

clear days he could see the far-away purple ranges, but whether they were mountains or simply knob formations, he could not tell. More likely the latter, because the Cumberlands did not trend this way. Again, he knew that this section of the state was more sparsely populated, as there was no railroad within many miles. And while he had not given these things consideration when he reached his hasty decision as Abe was packing his clothes, a full realization of them as he took up his solitary voyage in no way dimmed his ardor or made him regret his course.

Like a pendulum his body moved. The clank from the row-locks, and the tinkle of drops from the polished oars of ash as they rose glistening from each long stroke, formed an audible accompaniment to his progress. Mile after mile thus, with Roderick Dhu asleep in the stern in a half-curved posture, his upthrown shoulder and sloping side gleaming snowy white, and his thick yellow ruff like a lion's mane.

Saul kept in the current. More often this held him in the center of the river, but now and again a bend in its course would float him quite near the shore. Frequently not more than a score of feet separated him from land, and once he glided under an archway of boughs whose bending tips trailed in the water. Each bank was heavily wooded, but the channel seemed free from rocks or sunken snags, and the projecting drifts he could easily avoid.

When the moon was directly overhead Saul shipped his oars. He was not conscious of fatigue, but he wanted to smoke, and there was no hurry. At the flare of the match the dog lifted his head a few inches, thumped the planks twice with his tail, then grew quiet again. Cautiously the man

arose, stepped across the seat, and sat down again facing the prow. If he intended to drift, he had as well watch his progress. He was near the middle again, and as well as he could judge would make about six miles an hour merely drifting. There would be five hours till good daylight. Five times six was thirty. This, coupled with the thirty he had already gone, would take him sixty miles from home before morning.

"Nearly far enough, I guess," mused the young fellow, quietly wriggling into his coat, for there had come a sensation of chilliness when he stopped exercising. "I mustn't go too far away from dear old dad"—his thoughts ran on—"though I had to get out for a while. I can't see any use raising all this hullabaloo over a man-and-girl affair. There was no danger of marrying Jinsy—none in the world. But dad's mind is twisted and in his imagination he sees the ancestral acres in the grip of plebeian hands. Damn it! Has it come to the pass where a gentleman can't kiss a bar-maid without being driven from home? Who thought of marriage? Who thought of—maybe the old gentleman was right on that count! It was not my intention. A man surely can be honest with himself, and I wouldn't deliberately harm the girl. What a charmer she is, though! And how her lips can kiss!" He stirred, and his foot rustled paper. "Toilet articles! Bless my old maid aunt!" Beside the prim little bundle neatly folded and tied were the two others; his clothing and food. "A lunch wouldn't be amiss after that pull," he mused, while his fingers became busy with the smaller package. "Let's see what sort of a forager Abe is. Poor nigger! Actually boo-hoed—hard knot, of course!—when I left him. I guess there's something that shines pretty white

inside his blackness somewhere. . . . Light-bread! Fried chicken! Cold boiled ham! Wow, as the Injuns say in the story books. This is fat living. My stomach may be flapping about tomorrow at this time, but when I finish to-night it would do for a football!"

He ate leisurely, casting generous portions frequently to the now alert collie, who caught each morsel in his mouth, and gave two tail-thumps by way of thanks.

When the pair had finished their meal Saul discovered that they were reaching rougher country. The banks of the river were gradually growing higher, and he could see mammoth boulders sprawled at the water's edge like sleeping monsters of some earlier age. The pipe and food following his long row now induced drowsiness, and the lone voyager's thoughts turned toward sleep. The boat, unguided, had kept safely to the current for the past hour, so Saul resolved to take a nap as he drifted. Nothing worse could befall than being beached at some curve.

In his bundle of clothing he found a heavy blanket. Wrapping this about him, and using a folded hunting coat for a pillow, he carefully laid down with his head almost touching Dhu. To show his appreciation of this friendly act Dhu began to lick his master's ear, but a sharp command delivered with a tolerant laugh caused the dog to desist.

The Spring night was very calm and exceedingly still. As he lay thinking of the gypsy-like loveliness of Jinsy Galory, no sounds reached Saul's ears but the barely audible purl of water at the stern of the little craft. Lulled by this elfin gurgle, a delicious sense of wholesome weariness crept over him, and almost as quickly as a child

would have done he glided into slumber. Dhu also lay with closed eyes, but now and again a lid would partially lift to see that all was well.

Saul awoke in the early morning. He could not tell if the sun was up, for a dense white fog enveloped the river, blotting out each shore. He could see no further than a dozen feet in any direction. The blanket about him was covered with tiny drops of moisture, and the boat was wet as if rain washed.

"Now where am I, I wonder?" mused the young gentleman, rising stiffly on his elbow.

Dhu yawned, then pricked one ear oddly and watched his master.

"It would seem as though earth had turned into vapor, old pup, and we were adrift in a fog-sea. We've seen the like many a time at home, though, and we'll have the sun in an hour or two. In the meantime we'll breakfast on bread and bones, and be ready for a landing when the mist goes."

With a brisk movement he pushed the blanket from him, and as he did so something rattled to the bottom of the boat. Another moment he was holding in his hand a small glass bottle adorned with filigree of silver. The bottle was tightly stoppered; attached to its neck with a torn bit of red ribbon was a small piece of wood, while inside was some crumpled white paper.

Brow a-frown, Saul Brentley sat and stared at this astounding discovery. What was it, and where had it come from? He was quite sure it had not shipped with him when he left the landing at home. Aunt Emmy had nothing to do with it, because all her ribbons were plain black. He felt that the paper within would throw light upon the question; would probably explain it fully, but he had a curious hesitancy about removing the stop-

per. It pleased him just to sit and look at this mysterious messenger as it lay in the palm of his hand, and tax his mind for a solution, before accepting the one he felt would be provided when he withdrew the paper.

But prod his mind as he would, no deduction was forthcoming. He had gone to sleep several hours before in an open boat near the middle of the river; he had awakened to find a lady's perfume bottle by his side. Of one thing only was he reasonably sure. The portion of broken faggot held by the torn ribbon was to help keep the bottle afloat. But if it had been someone's intention to give the bottle to the river, how had it come to his boat?

A sudden lurch caused Saul to turn with an exclamation. Dhu had risen to his feet, and with forelegs extended was taking his morning stretch.

"No more o' that, Roddy! Down with you! Wait till we get ashore for those antics."

Under the firm but friendly pressure of a hand on his thick, wet ruff, Dhu curled up afresh and waited, patient-eyed.

"We've a mystery here, my Scotchman," resumed Saul, whimsically addressing the attentive collie; "and mayhap a romance. Beyond the per-adventure of a doubt there is a lady involved, and by the same token she is a young lady. This is not a spinster ribbon, nor does this silver-wired bottle evoke a vision of an old maid. And whereas there is one at home whom I truly love, and unto whom I must surely return, can any gallant gentleman of our south country turn his back upon a lady in need? I trow not, Roddy Dhu! Likewise, nae Scot would gang his way when duty called, so let's pledge ourselves, as right loyal modern knights, to succor this distressed unknown. Then we'll draw the stopper."

Whereupon Saul held out his hand, and the grave-faced collie put his paw therein in a most dignified manner.

"Good quality of paper, but mighty poor writing," commented the man, as he spread the small crumpled sheet out upon his knee. "Evidently done in a violent hurry, and with a lead pencil which failed to make a mark half the time. Listen, Dhu, here's what it says.

"'I am held for ransom by brigands' (Egad! Roddy, what did I tell you?) 'A week ago the coach from Cedarton to New Market was held up, and I was abducted. After a short dash overland on horseback I was forcibly drugged, and brought to this cave. How we gained this place I cannot say. It is a cleft in the face of a huge wall of cliff on the river. I can give no directions, for I know none. My prison seems impossible of access. It is thirty feet down a sheer stone wall. I cannot escape unaided, for it is sixty or seventy feet to the river. My companion is an old hag who seems half wild, but who treats me kindly. Should this be found, I pray that search be made for me speedily, for I cannot endure the suspense and dread. Go to Captain Jonathan Pembroke, near New Market, and tell him of the plight of Margot LaTour. I write this after midnight, while the old hag sleeps, and presently will cast it into the river. May God guide it to friendly hands!'" "

As he read this strange appeal the bantering tones gradually left Saul's voice, and when he finished his lips were mumbling inaudibly.

"The devil!" he exclaimed, throwing up his head and glaring at the enshrouding fog resentfully. "If Fate ever took a hand in human affairs it was last night," he added. "I drifted, asleep, just beneath the spot where she is held, at the mo-

ment when she cast this bottle out. The blanket is thick and the bottle small, so the blow was not enough to wake me. We must seek her at once. What does she say? 'Go to Captain Jonathan Pembroke, near New Market.' It seems I have heard the name; some sort of hamlet, I believe. But where is it? And where am I? Damn this fog!"

He savagely tugged a big silver watch from his waistcoat.

"Eight o'clock! Heavens! Won't the sun ever get through? I can't wait for it. I may be ten miles below New Market! So here's for a landing, and a word with the first person I see!"

The oars rattled and the boat swerved to the right. A score of strokes brought him to shore, and sent him crashing through the foliage of a bending willow into a low mud bank. Dhu was up and out on the instant, scrambling past his master with eager feet. As Saul was securing the boat to the willow, Dhu capered about among the wiry grass and low weeds, voicing his delight at liberty regained in short, happy yelps.

"Now, boy, whereaway? It seems our adventuring has begun before we are quite ready for it."

Brentley came forward as he spoke, casting about for a path or road. None was visible. The spot was weed- and bush-grown, but an opening showed in one direction, and toward this Saul hastened. Presently he descried a stone fence, and coming up to this found a high road on the other side. His spirits rose, for here was an unmistakable sign of civilization. Dhu bounded over first, to stop with a snarl, his ruff rising. Saul, atop the fence, saw a ghostly figure plodding toward him through the now lifting mist, followed

closely by a huge, shambling form which went on all fours.

"Dhu," he called, "here!"

Agilely the dog responded, and leaping to his master's feet crouched shivering against his legs, giving vent to alternate whines of fright and sharp barks of rage.

Very soon the oncomer and his companion were plainly visible, both halting presently in the middle of the road. The man turned and faced the twain on the fence, and the big black bear with him squatted on his haunches and ran a red tongue around his lips.

"A happy morning to you!" said the man, taking off a fur cap from the rear of which dangled a coon's tail.

"The same to you, good sir!" returned Saul, promptly, viewing the bizarre couple with interest.

The man was tall and spare of frame, and was clad in a mixture of leather and skins. His trousers and belt were of leather, his shirt indeterminate, his close-fitting coat a motley of many small pelts ingeniously sewed together, with a fringe of fur around the bottom. Twined about his shoulders and hanging down on his chest were a number of rawhide lashes; some plain, some braided into thick goads. Under one arm he carried a bundle of axe helves, tied together. They were very white and smooth, and evidently had just been made. The bear, as he sat awkwardly in the road, reached well past the man's middle. There was no leading-rope nor tether of any kind about the animal's neck. The man's face was lean, reddish-brown, and clean shaved. He had projecting, bushy brows and mild, blue expressionless eyes.

"A stranger you are, with your furr'n dog,"

resumed the man, replacing his cap and giving his head a quick twirl so that the tail rested on the back of his neck. "And be you journeyin' my way, suppose we make it together? Paddyfoot is a good bear."

He smiled, twisting one corner of his mouth up quaintly, and fondled the brute's muzzle with his hand. The bear licked his fingers, and blinked contentedly.

"I seek the little burg of New Market."

Saul jumped from the fence as he spoke, and advancing, held out his hand.

"My name is Saul Brentley, and I have come down the river from up near Hillsboro."

The other's strong, bony hand came out and promptly closed over his.

"My name is Mordecai Fode, at your service. I live in Beechum's Woods, and I am a philosopher."

Brentley did not attempt to check the smile which sprang to his lips at this speech, and his eyes went anew to the coiled rawhides and the bundle of helves.

"These," said Mordecai Fode, "are my pastime. I make 'em for such as want to buy at Cedarton and New Market and along the road. I travel much, and find many things in Nature upon which to exercise my gift. Not a leaf I brush, not a stone I kick, but speaks to me. Here." He bent and picked up a pebble. "That to you, and to mankind in general, is a little rock. To me it is wonderful as the world. Where did it come from? How long has it been here? What is it made of? One might spend a lifetime with this little rock. The same way with a blade of grass or a drop of dew or a hair from Paddyfoot's back. You do not understand, but you are not a philosopher." He carelessly let the pebble fall, and re-

sumed. "To New Market? Yes, I am bound thither, and would be proud o' your company. But 'tis a winding, runabout way we go, and be your mission speedy, 'twould be faster by the river."

"I am in haste"—broke in Saul—"great haste."

"You must have drifted by New Market in the fog, but a stranger might pass it on the river with the broad sun overhead, and never know it. It can't be seen from the water, lyin' a good half mile or three-quarters to the north. But had it been clear Gypsy George would have hailed you, for nothin' passes his shack without speech from him."

"Who is he, pray?"

"The little, dried-up fellow who runs the ferry on the New Market road. 'Jews-harp George' or 'Gypsy George,' it's all one. All day long he sits in his door and plays, a-buzzin' and a-dronin' the hours away. When anybody wants to cross, by boat or raft, he lays his harp down, but he comes back to it as soon as he can. Ten cents a person; two bits a hoss an' buggy; three shillin's for a two-hoss wagon or a yoke o' oxen. Gypsy has a-plenty."

"How far back up the river must I go to reach this ferry?"

"Two mile, it may be. You can't pass it, 'cause Gypsy will be in his door on t'other side, jig-jiggin' that forefinger o' his against the bit o' metal that makes his tune."

"I'd like to tarry and talk with you, Mr. Fode," said Saul. "I'd like to journey afoot with you, but it behooves me to reach New Market by the quickest route. I shall hope to see you again, and as it seems probable I am to be in your neighborhood for some time, I doubtless will. I want to

ask you about your bear, and how it is he follows you about as my dog follows me.'

"Paddyfoot is a good bear," repeated the skins-and-leather man, patting the flat, soft head near his elbow. "We live in Beechum's Woods, and I follow the life of a philosopher. 'Tis not a far journey, and you would be welcome there."

"I will come if I find the time," Saul replied. "In the meanwhile we may meet in the little village."

"At the public kept by Cadwallader Hull, where refreshment may be had for man and beast, as is required by law. At the sign of the Leaning Stump. I bid you good-day, and wish you a safe voyage."

And Mordecai Fode, philosopher, took his coon-skin cap from his head the second time, bowed, replaced his cap, then turning, continued his way, Paddyfoot the bear shuffling along silently behind.

"Did you ever see the like o' that, my Scotch-man?" demanded young Brentley. "You are a wise dog to stay out of the reach of bruin's claws, and I'm not scolding you. But what a peculiar chap the man is! Come, we must hurry, lad!" He climbed the fence as he was speaking, and with Dhu trotting at his side walked swiftly back to the river. "Remember that Margot LaTour is depending upon you and me. A moment now, boy. We must have a bite before we begin to pull, for it's upstream, you know. Here are your chicken bones, and here is my bread and ham. All right; eat fast as you like. If you are as hungry as I, these bones are tasting mighty good. We'll have things started in a short time now. And Captain Jonathan Pembroke is the man we want to see, Dhu; don't forget that."

V

Having to do with a certain ferryman, with a trainer of horses, and ending with a perplexing denouement.

Roderick Dhu had no mind for further voyaging, because the long night trip had cramped him and made him sore, and he hung back as his master's voice ordered him aboard. Time being precious, Saul did not dally with his reluctant retainer, but picked him up bodily and placed him in the boat, bidding him stay there. To cast off required only a moment, and they were afloat once more.

Over the face of the river the fog still hung, but it was lifting and thinning rapidly, and the location of the sun could easily be discerned through the grayish vapor. Saul, keeping within fifteen or twenty feet of the shore in order to escape the tug of the current, began to row upstream. His thoughts were all of the present now, and of the immediate future. Banished from his mind for the time was Jinsy of the liquid black eyes, Colonel Shad, Aunt Emmeline, and all the rest. Instead, as is the vagrant way of youth, he was wondering who this Margot LaTour could be, and where she had come from. And, it must be told, he wondered further if she were fair, and if it would be given him to rescue her from her distressful situation. How fine and brave it would be if he could accomplish this single-handed. If he could discover that cleft where she was hidden and held prisoner, and alone, by guile or by strength, bring her safely away! It was a strong

appeal to adventurous youth, and the thought thrilled him, but on the instant he realized such a thing was next to impossible. He must have the assistance of some one who knew the country. He would go to the man mentioned in the note, and volunteer his services.

So light of heart and so a-bubble with anticipation of high adventure did our hero become, that he actually broke into song as he pulled away. It was the dear old Scotch air "Auld Lang Syne" which he voiced, in tones most mellow and sweet, albeit powerful. Beating the accent with his oars, he sent stave after stave rolling over the water and along the shores, both of which soon became visible. Each bank was thick with its fringe of tangled greenery. Sometimes leaning trees stretched their arms downward and trailed tendriled fingers in the water below; sometimes there were bushes, sumac, elderberry, and many sycamore saplings; sometimes dense brakes where many things grew. Because of this verdant, ever-present barrier, he could gain no idea of the nature of the country beyond, except it must be flat, and therefore farmland or pasture.

For an hour he toiled ceaselessly, then he thought him it was time he was nearing the ferry of which the man with the bear had spoken. As he poised his oars in the rowlocks to take a look about, he heard a thin, keen hail, cutting the air like a blade.

"Boat ahoy—ee—ee! Boat ahoy—ee—ee!"

Saul twisted his head and gazed in the direction of the sound. On the other bank of the river, a hundred feet or more upstream, a figure stood waving its arms wildly. A grotesque figure, low, broad-shouldered, with curiously bowed legs. As Saul turned the hail came again:

"Boat ahoy—*ee—ee!* Where bound, my master?"

Without attempting a reply, the rower dipped his oars and started across the river. He would put a few questions to this individual. The passage was accomplished quickly, and Saul brought his boat to a dozen feet from land. As he lifted his eyes he saw a crude log landing flush with the river brink, a highway leading back from it, and to one side a tiny log house. A boat similar to his own was moored near, and further off a huge raft was tied with a chain cast around a stump. The man who had shouted at him stood on the landing, an odd-looking creature with legs curved like barrel hoops, and wearing a short black beard all over his face. In one hand he held a jews-harp.

Saul tilted his cap with his forearm and drew his sleeve across his dripping forehead.

"Good morning, Gypsy George!" he called.

Two rows of shining white teeth appeared in the black growth on the ferryman's face, and he laughed in a high, monotonous key.

"You know me, young master!" he answered, craning his neck forward in scrutiny. "Everybody knows me, for I have been here long. But I know you not. Never have I set you across the river; never, in flood or drouth."

He laughed again, and the impression was as if a piece of mechanism had gone off when a spring was released.

"I have never laid eyes on you before this moment," agreed Saul. "But one told me I would find you here, and here you are."

"One told you I served at the ferry? Ah, yes! Everybody knows me!"

"A man with a great bear at his heels was my informant."

"Oh! Mordy Fode."

Gypsy George's grinning features became sober, and he shook his head.

"He would be wise if he wasn't foolish. The long sickness came on him, and they gave him yarbs. Yarbs saved his life, but they hurt his mind. . . . Whither bound, young master? I gather news from those who pass, as well as take them across with dry feet. I stay here always, and the world is large."

"To New Market I go," returned young Brentley, beginning to marvel at the speech of the lone ferryman. "But first, I would be directed to the home of Captain Jonathan Pembroke. Do you know him, Romany man?"

Now a dark scowl spread over the low forehead of the person before him, and he spat on the ground.

"I hate him!" he answered, with sudden viciousness, and closing one fist he drove it downward by his side.

"Oho!" breathed Saul to himself, "I have touched a sore!" Aloud: "I know nothing of that, being come from up the river, but I have pressing business with the gentleman, and must see him at once. Will you tell me where he may be found, or must I go elsewhere?"

Some powerful kind of emotion must have been stirring in the dark little man's brain, for now his eyes were downcast and he was muttering. Shifting glances, too, he cast at the young fellow in the boat; glances which seemed to indicate a desire to ask questions which he was afraid to utter. At last:

"You came from up river?" he demanded, his agitation hardening his voice.

"Yes; I said it."

"How far?"

"That doesn't matter."

"You came by boat all the way?"

"All the way—but these questions border on the impertinent. Answer me: will you direct me to Captain Pembroke's, or must I go and inquire at the village?"

At this the ferryman's manner underwent a change. He became suspiciously suave and polite. He smiled and bowed, and his voice was honeyed as he replied:

"Your pardon, young master. I didn't want to make you mad. But this man you name has done me a great wrong; it is because of him I sit by the river all the days, picking pennies from the palms of people as they pass——"

"You are no more Romany than I!" burst out Saul. "Why then, do they call you Gypsy George?"

The man's smile remained, but the gleam in his eyes was not of mirth.

"A low fellow put the name upon me, maybe because of my dark skin and my black hair; a worthless rascal called Noey Mole, who haunts the public at New Market and idles in the tap-room of the Limping Dog on the Cedarton road." He gave a meaningless gesture with his arm. "It's all the same. One must be known by something."

"I think a fare approaches!" exclaimed Saul, gazing up the road down which a solitary horseman was coming on a spirited mount.

Gypsy George wheeled with a cat-like movement, and instantly gave a start which the watching boatman plainly saw.

"What is it, ferryman?" he asked. "Why do you start at the chance of a piece of silver coming your way? Are patrons so rare?"

Now Gypsy George, or Jews-harp George, as he

was also known, became confused, and several seconds passed before he could fetch an answer.

"I twisted my ankle when I turned, and it seemed to you like I jumped. I know the man; he is Mack Leek."

"Very well. Now tell me how to reach Captain Pembroke's, and I'll be off."

"Yes, young master, I could tell you, but the man coming yonder is going your way, no doubt, and could guide you to the house."

"Which is better, I agree. Ask him if he fares in that direction."

Horse and rider were within a dozen rods now, and as he spoke, to Brentley's intense amazement, the dark man ran with great speed to meet the comer. Such an unusual proceeding was a cause of much perplexity to Saul, who could see no reason in the world for it. But as the two came together out of earshot and began a low-pitched conversation, a suspicion which grew prodigiously within the next few moments found lodgment in the young man's brain. Things were not as straight here as they should be, although he had to admit that his grounds for any just doubt were rather poor. The greatest and only real reason he had for this mental attitude was the inaudible colloquy in progress down the road.

Saul felt that he had reached a portion of the state much different from that he had left, although geographically it lay not so far from the home acres. But here it was rugged, more unsettled, and the characters he had thus far met might almost have served as types of backwoods days. He thought of what Aunt Emmy had said of brigands, and of how her words had been verified that morning when he first awoke. It was the part of discretion to be careful, at least until

he had given the note which lay in an inner pocket to the hands of a friend.

Cautiously dropping an oar, he inched his boat back from the bank until four or five yards of water intervened, then fell to waiting with growing impatience. The morning was passing, and practically he had made no progress on his errand. As he sat, his restlessness increasing momentarily, he looked at the man on the horse. He was a big fellow. His age was difficult to guess, for a luxuriant brown beard fell half-way to his waist. He wore boots which reached to his knees, and a slouch hat with a portion of the brim brought up and pinned to the crown. His actions were quick and nervous. The black horse he sat on was evidently blooded stock, for it stood with head up and restless feet, chafing at the bit.

The conversation continued for so long that Saul was preparing to depart without further ado, when the twain drew apart suddenly and advanced toward him. Presently they were at the edge of the landing, and greetings were exchanged between Saul and the newcomer. The man on the horse continued.

"My friend here tells me that you've journeyed all night down the river, and are seekin' Jonathan Pembroke."

Bold and bright were the eyes of the horseman as he spoke, but his deep voice had a pleasing quality which inspired confidence.

"Your friend did not tell you all the truth," replied Saul, a little nettled. "It is true that I seek Captain Pembroke, but as for the rest, that is as it may be."

"You've never been hereabout before, I take it?"

"No."

"Won't you step ashore an' take a bite with



us? George has food an' drink, an' would be glad to give you a bite an' a sup."

To Brentley this sudden offer of hospitality appeared unduly eager. But he answered with courtesy:

"Thank you, but I have breakfasted already. Does it chance your route is across the river?"

"No; business with George brought me to the ferry. I'll ride back in a few minutes. Do you stay at New Market long?"

"That I cannot answer. Do I follow yonder road to the village?"

He inclined his head toward the opposite shore.

"I'm sorry you won't tarry long enough to get acquainted," declared the big, bearded man whose name was Mack Leek. "I'm a dealer in horses. I train 'em, and break wild ones. You wouldn't want to buy a horse?"

"I fear not, though the one you sit upon might tempt any man who lives in Kentucky."

"His training is good. Wait just a minute, an' I'll show you what he can do."

With that the big fellow gathered up the reins, squeezed the black with his knees, and began to put him through a sort of performance. The horse reared and backed on his hind feet, pranced and caracoled, and did some fancy steps. Then, lo! as his rider brought him mincing back with tossing head and flashing eyes to the landing's edge the shining black form suddenly bunched itself together, and the next moment had leaped straight at the boat and its occupants! It came down with a terrific splash, short of the boat by half a man's length. Saul was so surprised that he scarcely realized what had taken place, till he saw Mack Leek thrust out his arm and lay hold upon the side of the boat. The man's face was

twisted, as with rage. So sudden and unexpected was this assault, that Brentley was rendered incapable of action for a moment. A second more, and the frail craft most probably would have been overturned, but in the passing of that second a white shape hurled itself from its position in the stern and, with a rattling growl, sank its teeth in the gripping hand. With an oath of pain and rage Mack Leek released his hold and tore his hand from Dhu's mouth. At the same time Saul, aroused now and watchful, gave one deep, long stroke and was a dozen feet away.

The black swam to shallower water, and there Mack Leek stood in his stirrups and shook his mangled hand in wrath.

"Did I know the horse would jump?" he yelled. "An' 'twas pretty help you give me settin' your dog on me! I'll even with you yet, young furiner, an' you stay here!"

And with that he sent his horse scrambling up the wet and slippery bank, where Gypsy George, leaning forward, seized the bridle and helped the animal to firmer land.

Because Saul was young, because he felt that treachery had been attempted, and because his blood was hot, a sharp retort which would have been in the nature of a defiance leaped to his tongue. But he refrained from shouting it. The man had played innocent, had made it appear as if he were the victim of his horse's sudden freak, and Brentley had to grant the thing was barely possible. So, curbing with an effort his inclination to reply in kind, he said nothing in answer, but rowed to the other landing. There he tied his boat up, took his bundles and turned toward the road.

On the opposite shore the black horse was cropping grass, while Gypsy George and Mack Leek

were walking toward the ferryman's shack, which they presently entered.

Saul secured his bundles to a stout stick, flung this over his shoulder, and whistling to Dhu, faced the low rise leading away from the bank of the stream.

VI

Concerning a moon-eyed horse and a star-eyed girl.

Gaining the level, our youthful adventurer saw what appeared a goodly land. To right and left was a broad stretch of rolling country, cultivated fields dotted with timber groups. Far in the distance, in the direction of his home, misty, upheaved shapes suggested a mountainous district. In another locality, and quite near at hand, was a forest. Before him, in the middle distance, he saw a handsome brick house with colonial front, resting upon the crest of a slight eminence and surrounded by stately trees. This was the only habitation visible. But the little village he sought could not be far away, so he set out briskly on his march.

He had been trudging along for perhaps fifteen minutes, when a sudden, short scream, as of fright, brought him up quickly. It sounded almost in his ear. Dhu, trotting at the roadside, stopped also, and cocked one ear forward inquiringly. The travelers had come to where, just ahead of them, a lane bisected the highway. The fence corner here was dense with cedar bushes, and obstructed the view as effectually as a wall. In a few quick steps Saul had rounded this corner, then stopped abruptly, overcome by amazement.

He saw a long spring wagon, two of its wheels in a ditch and two on the road, its body thereby inclined at a perilous angle. To this wagon was

a horse, that was likewise in the ditch, with one foreleg over the shaft. Clinging to the seat of the wagon, with blue bonnet fallen back from her head, was the rarest vision which had ever delighted a man's eyes. Clad in the daintiest of frocks, her hair a-wave in the morning breeze, she gazed at young Brentley with large, violet eyes wherein distress and appeal were blended most charmingly.

For a fleeting moment Saul stared at this bewildering apparition, the while some very peculiar sensations began to manifest themselves. On the border of his mind the face of Jinsy Galory dawned and faded, then he was leaping forward with his cap in his hand and a smile on his lips.

"Let me help you," he exclaimed, casting his stick and bundles on the ground and approaching the horse, which stood patiently in its awkward position. "Gad! I'm glad I happened by!"

And as his feet moved toward the ditch his eyes still clung to the maiden's face, which was in truth as lovely as any flower. Delicately tinted it was, like a white morning-glory shaded with pink, while her mouth and chin were snares for reason. So, because his eyes went one way and his feet another, it came about that Saul tripped at the edge of the road, and almost fell. Then the girl laughed, and spoke in a voice like the melody of a small woodland stream running over pebbles.

"Oh, sir! Be careful! You're not watching where you're going!"

Saul's cheeks reddened, but he answered boldly:

"How could one cast his eyes below, lady, when you are above?"

The vision in the wagon smiled at his speech, as though pleased, and dropped her head.

"Will you be kind enough to help me in this

mischance which has befallen?" she begged, coyly flashing her eyes at the stalwart young man.

"That I will, with all my heart!" Saul answered, and began to investigate the trouble. "If I may ask," he resumed, tugging at the buckle which held the belly-band, "how in the world does it happen that your horse stands in this ditch when he should be on the road?"

"I scarcely know, sir," returned she of the distracting hair and eyes like violets washed with dew. "Did never behaved this way before. I have driven him often, and always he has traveled well and truly. We were jogging forward here a few minutes ago, when all at once, without reason or provocation, Did ambled into the ditch, and almost upset me. I think maybe I screamed just a little."

"*Did?*" queried Saul, pulling mightily at the bound strap, while the horse persistently swelled out his chest in resistance. "Did you say *Did?*"

"Did? Yes, sir; I said Did."

"You must pardon me if I appear thickheaded, but is Did the name of your horse?"

Now the seraph on the seat threw up her chin and vented a bubbling cadenza of mirth. Twice the joyous laugh was repeated, and the man felt a wave of delight flooding him.

"Egad!" thought he, "have I unwittingly strayed into heaven?"

"I forgot you were a stranger!" apologized the merry Venus.

"I'll have to cut your harness, lady," said Saul, ceasing his efforts to release the buckle, "in order to set things right. Your horse is bound tight and fast, and I cannot loose him. . . . You were going to explain?" he added, feeling for his knife.

"Yes, it was a fancy of mine, you must know,

and I suspect a foolish one. I named him Did. Did is short for Didymus, whose given name was Thomas, who was an apostle, or a disciple, or something. But there was a horse called Tom on the plantation already, and Didymus is horribly ugly, so I just shortened it. Which of course was stupid."

"Which was exceedingly clever," corrected young Brentley. "I congratulate you upon your originality. . . . Now, lady, your Did is free, but as he is too heavy to lift off the shaft, I must try and back the wagon. So if you will graciously get out for a moment, to lighten it, I think you can resume your journey soon."

By far the simplest way out of the predicament would have been to lead the animal forward, after loosening straps and traces, and Saul knew this quite well. But he was in no hurry for this delightful incident to conclude, and accordingly he hurriedly invented the plan now proposed. It would delay matters in a satisfactory manner, and it plainly was his duty as a gentleman to assist the girl to alight. He started eagerly forward as he spoke, with this purpose in mind, but the maiden was up and out with a quick leap before he could gain her side.

"Can't I help you some way?" she asked, coming shyly toward him, smoothing the front of her flowered dress.

"I fear not, other than by getting down, which you have already done. I was coming to help you——" in gentle reproach.

"That would have been gallant, but quite useless. I am active, and very strong."

"Will Miss Goliath kindly bear the burden of my cap, then, as I proceed with the work of rescue?"

Bowing low, he extended the article mentioned with a whimsical smile.

"You please to be facetious, Sir Stranger," she said, falling in with his mood and making him a slight curtsy; "but I will hold your cap for you."

"Thanks. Now kindly stand at the apostle's head while I pull the wagon from him. Here, give me your hand! This bank is steep."

So, willy-nilly, he grasped her hand firmly and helped her into the ditch. Then, leaving her caressing Did's nose and half frowning because of his temerity, Saul went to the rear of the light vehicle, and hove. The effort was successful.

In a short time horse and wagon were safe in the lane once more, and as the man got Did in the shafts and patched as best he could the strap he had cut, the girl stood to one side with her back half turned, making friends with Dhu.

"You're a pretty thing!" Saul heard her say.

And as he looked, she bent and clasped her fingers around the dog's sharp muzzle, and brought her eyes close to his. "You're honest, and faithful, and courageous, and true. I'm quite sure you'd never touch anyone's hand without permission, and then it would be an humble caress."

"Gracious!" thought Saul. "Is that meant for me? But I am sure I was careful, and altogether respectful!"

The girl glanced over her shoulder.

"I like your dog!" she called.

"He's far ahead of most men," Brentley replied, his neck growing warm. "I can depend upon him in any emergency. He's the soul of loyalty. . . . I think I have discovered the reason why your horse behaved so queerly," he continued.

"Oh, have you?" cried the girl, brightly, as she

hastened up. "I'm so glad. I couldn't imagine what the trouble was, and I was thinking I couldn't drive him again. What is it?"

"He's moon-eyed," said Saul, picking up stick and bundles and standing somewhat apart.

"Moon-eyed!"

"Undoubtedly."

"How did you—are you a horse doctor?"

"Not by profession, but I know something of such things."

"I never heard of it. Is it a disease?"

"Yes, and very serious. I would advise you to get another animal when you drive."

"Tell me about it—and show me. Won't you, please? Poor old Did!"

She patted his neck compassionately.

"Look at his eyes," said Brentley, coming and standing beside her. "See how cloudy they are?—the milky-looking substance floating in them? In time he will go blind."

"And is that why he got off the road?"

"Exactly. He can barely see now."

"But why do they call it that? His eyes don't look like the moon."

"No. The moon is supposed to affect them. Just whether it is the *light* of the moon or the *dark* of the moon I can't say, but one of those periods is supposed to produce this condition, and that is when a horse is moon-eyed."

He was staring at her now with a peculiar intendment, but without boldness.

"What is it, sir?" she asked.

"I was thinking about eyes," he answered, soberly.

"Eyes?"

"Yes, in relation to the heavenly bodies. Here I have found a moon-eyed horse, and all the time

I have been in the presence of a star-eyed girl!"

"Oh, sir! How can you?"

But she was blushing hotly, and vaguely feeling for Dhu's ear as he sat almost against her.

"Indeed, I must go now," she added, in charming confusion. "I've an errand in New Market and must be home soon. Let me thank you for your assistance. I don't know what would have become of me without it."

She extended her arm as she spoke, in frank cordiality.

"It would have fallen to the lot of some worthier person to serve you," said Saul, taking her hand and holding it closely—and he marveled at the feel of it in his big grip; so small, and soft, and cool, and comradely in its clasp. "You go to New Market?"

"Yes," gently but firmly withdrawing her hand.

"That is my destination, too."

"Indeed?"

"And your horse isn't safe."

"I think I can manage him now. It isn't far."

"And you may get ditched again."

"I will be more careful."

"And he will draw better with two in the wagon."

"Sir, you leave me no choice. Get in."

"Indeed I thank you! But I felt that you would have pity on a weary traveler. When you are seated, I will join you."

He cast his bundles and stick in the bed of the wagon, and turned to assist her.

But the lady held back.

"You must get in first," she said.

"But gallantry demands——"

"Gallantry go hang!" interrupted she of the wonderful eyes. "Are you as stupid as you are strong?"

So she reviled him, frowning terribly and stamping an invisible foot.

"Stupid I may be," retorted our hero, bowing slightly; "but I fail to see how the occasion should give a gentleman precedence——"

"*Climb up!*" she burst out. "Don't you see how high the step is?"

She whirled as she finished, so that he could not see her face.

Saul, feeling foolish, meekly got into the wagon.

"I don't think there is any chance of rain," he observed, presently, sweeping the sky with a comprehensive glance.

A swishing and soft crushing of fabric told him that his companion had found his side.

He gathered up the lines awkwardly.

"Shall I drive?" he asked, in a very humble voice.

"No; I want to show you that I *can* manage Did, if he is moon-eyed."

He gave her the lines, crossed his legs, and stared straight ahead.

And in this wise they were rolling directly down the weed-bordered road, Dhu trailing with his inquisitive right ear up, as though he did not understand.

VII.

Relating the most diverting conversation of two young people, and entering the tavern of The Leaning Stump.

"Had it not occurred to you," said Miss Blue Bonnet, "that I might like to know your name? I might meet a friend, or something, and what could I say?"

The young man uncrossed his legs at this, and turned his head. Only the tip of a small, straight nose could he see.

"Had it not occurred to you," he retorted, "that sunbonnets, while probably good for the complexion, might prove most annoying at times?"

"You are impudent!" she said, positively, and slapped Did's round back with a line.

"You are captivating," he answered, leaning forward to peep around the provoking barrier.

She was smiling.

"Sir, I cannot ride with a stranger!"

"Nor shall you. My name is Saul."

She threw him a dainty glance of mischief.

"Saul?"

The word was like a note of music to the man's ears. He did not know that she had honeyed the monosyllable purposely.

"Saul Brentley."

"Do you preach?"—artlessly.

"No; but sometimes I swear!"

"Oh! . . . But there was a Saul who

preached, you know. I have read of it—some-where.”

“But that Saul was not very complimentary to your sex. I think I must be unlike him, in every way.”

Came a silence when the plodding of Did’s leisurely feet on the soft earth was the only sound. Very suddenly:

“My name is Dorothy,” he heard.

“Glorious! None other would suit you.”

“My middle name is Mehitabel.”

“O Lord! Why did you tell me?”

“Do you dare ridicule my name, sir?”

She turned toward him, stern and frigid.

“Don’t ask me to say it’s pretty—that second, awful name! How could they treat a helpless infant that way?”

There was something so droll and so pitiable in his puckered face that Dorothy Mehitabel laughed.

“I hate it, too!” she confided. “It belonged to father’s sister, and auntie insisted on my wearing it, also.”

“And you have lived to be grown! But Dorothy is sweet as clover-blossoms.”

“Do you write poetry, Mr. Saul?”

“I think I could today. Let’s see:

Girl of the honey-colored hair,
A poet loves you, so beware!

How does that sound?”

“Sweet.”

“Truly?”

“Why shouldn’t it? It brings to mind the honey jar at home!”

“You mock me, Lady Dorothy! I rhyme for you no more.”

He thrust his hands in his pockets, and sighed. "New Market is just around yonder hill," she said, a few moments later.

"Which reminds me that I have an urgent mission to perform, one in executing which I must beg your assistance."

"How can I help?"

"I have business of the first importance with Captain Jonathan Pembroke. Whereaway does he live?"

Now the staid and plodding Did felt a hard-pulled bit fretting his mouth, and he obediently stopped.

"Captain Jonathan Pembroke!"

With knees swung around so that they almost touched Saul's leg, Miss Dorothy repeated the name as if to assure herself it had been uttered.

"I must speak with him on a vital subject as quickly as possible. Do you know him?"

"Captain Pembroke is my father!"

"Your—father!" faltered Saul. And as his hand moved toward an inner pocket: "Then maybe you know Margot LaTour?"

The fresh face into which he looked paled white at his words, and the lines dropped from her hands. Then the crimson blood rushed up to her cheeks, her eyes sparkled, and with an impulsive forward movement she clasped Saul's arm, gripping it fiercely.

"For heaven's sake, sir, tell me all you know, and be quick! She was taken from the stage coach, abducted, a week ago. My friend, on her way to visit me! Deef Dick knew nothing except the highwaymen were masked, and the leader was a big man. They want ransom—ten thousand dollars—and Margot is an orphan, and poor! The country has been searched high and

low, every corner. We can find no trace. Oh, sir! speak! speak! My precious Margot!"

As the rushing words ceased Dorothy bowed her head, while her young form heaved with great sobs which she could not subdue. Still her hands held Saul's arm, and she leaned toward him, sobbing, sobbing.

"In mercy's name, dear lady, be calm!" he exclaimed, sitting helpless, because the letter he wanted was in a pocket which must be reached with his left hand, and that was the arm to which the distressed young woman clung. "I can't stand tears—a woman's tears—a pretty woman's tears! Indeed I can't. I shall surely do something I shouldn't. I feel myself growing unaccountable. Please! *Please*, Dorothy, try to control your grief. We will find your friend—I promise you upon my honor!"

And whether it was because he could not help it, or whether his own words emboldened him, he bent and kissed one of the tight little hands.

Miss Pembroke loosed her hold upon him at this, and finding a handkerchief somewhere, pressed it to her eyes with a long, shivering sigh. Then she looked at him in pathetic misery, her lips still tremulous and her round young bosom a-heave.

Quietly, and with sympathetic face, Saul gave her the note which had come to him in such a miraculous way.

She read it eagerly, with jerky, fluttering breaths, and at the words where the pencil had failed to mark and the indentations were almost gone, she leaned toward Saul to get him to help decipher it. And he, sly fellow, taking advantage of her absorption in the message, leaned to her in order to see the better, and as a result of these joint leanings their shoulders were presently

fitted snugly together, and Saul was rewarded by a delicate wafture, as of rose petals, from her hair. But the reading was over far too quickly, albeit the graceless adventurer stumbled and stuttered and dallied until he feared his ruse would be discovered, and then Miss Dorothy must needs draw back to a safe distance, and fold her hands in her lap with face suddenly grown grave and thoughtful.

"How did you come by this letter?" she asked, speaking as though to herself.

So he told her of his trip down the river, merely mentioning his home, for there was a certain lass back there who already, it seemed to him, had receded in his affections; of his waking in the misty morning to find the bottle and the bit of wood, which he produced in evidence; of his meeting with Mordecai Fode and the bear; and of his concluding adventure at the ferry.

"Gypsy George is a rascal," said the girl, still musingly.

"He told me your father had wronged him!" blurted out Saul.

"Father was his best friend until he had to drive him from the place. Some day you may hear the story."

She put finger and thumb to her lower lip and squeezed it in the middle to a pouting patch of crimson. Her eyes were ruminative. Saul was silent. Back of the pinched-out lip two small white teeth were gleaming. Would it be much to his discredit to declare that the man was not thinking of luckless Margot that moment? For a truth his mind dwelt on—kisses!

Her hand dropped; the teeth vanished, and her next sentence brought Saul back to the problem of the moment.

"I believe Mack Leek tried to take you!"

"It's been a toss-up in my judgment, with the odds that way," agreed Brentley. "But why in the world should he want me unless——"

He rounded his eyes and whistled.

"What do you suspect, Dorothy?"

"I suspect Mack Leek has something to do with Margot's disappearance, *Mr. Brentley*."

"Oh, bother the mister! We can't be real good and close friends a-mistering and a-missing each other!"

The lady's eyebrows promptly arched like rain-bows.

"Who, I wonder, would have the presumption to suppose we should be 'good, close friends'? What would you think of a girl who would admit to her friendship any stray wanderer who might come up from the river? Shame on you, *Mr. Saul*!"

"Shame or no, you are Dorothy to me," averred Brentley, stoutly. "The name is too pretty to mar with a silly prefix. . . . This big man with the big beard, now. He told me he dealt in horses."

A thrill ran through Dorothy's frame at the polite stubbornness of the handsome stranger, but she thought it best to frown somewhat, as though displeased, as she picked up the reins again, and said:

"Which is true enough—cluck-cluck!" with her tongue in her cheek. And as Did started out again—"But tales are told, nevertheless, in which his name is spoken. Two miles beyond the ferry the Nashville road winds over the knobs, and more than one hold-up has taken place recently. People are afraid to speak out, but they whisper together in the tavern o' nights."

"Is there a band?"

"Usually four or five. They mask, but the

leader is always the same—a large man who never speaks. His underlings do the necessary talking.”

“And knowing I had come down the river, Mack Leek suspicioned I might have discovered something. He would have held me a prisoner, do you suppose?”

“Yes, until Margot is ransomed, which I fear will never be. Father has written to her uncle, who is a tailor in Philadelphia, but he is poor. Oh! I don’t know what we will do!”

They clattered over a small bridge, and began to slowly ascend a long hill, the horse at a very slow walk.

“From what you say, I think we had better eliminate the question of money,” said Saul.

“Then *what* shall we do? Poor Margot will die!”

“No, we will have to bring Margot away,” replied Brentley, emphatically.

“But how, from such a fearful place?”

“By hard, solid work, by craft—and maybe by main force.”

“The demand for ransom held also a threat against any who sought to find her.”

“But you have searched, anyhow.”

“Yes, father has gone about a great deal himself, though he is getting old, and has persuaded others to look. He was a soldier, you know, and he has no idea of fear.”

“How far away are these high cliffs which wall the river?”

“I don’t know—several miles. Maybe seven or eight. It is very rocky and desolate there.”

“I can’t see how they reached the hole midway up that face of stone,” mused Saul. “But if she and the old woman with her got there, it is cer-

tain others can. There could be no better hiding place in all the world."

Miss Pembroke remained silent, and Saul, fastening his gaze on a tiny black spot just at the hem of his companion's spreading skirts, which he guessed to be the toe of a slipper, began to think furiously. At last the corner of his mouth twisted into something like a smile, and he brought his palms down on his knees with the hearty query:

"Will you make a compact with me?"

The lady jumped, so abrupt had been the movement, and lifted a face half surprised, half indignant.

"Gracious, sir! Would you frighten one out of her skin? What do you mean?"

"I have been thinking," replied Saul, in no wise taken aback by the rebuke.

"They must have been strenuous thoughts to have fathered such an action! My heart is still racing."

She placed one hand upon her breast, and regarded him reproachfully.

"I am very contrite, and ask your pardon. But a sort of revelation came to me, and I smote my knees under the force of it. Now, will you make a pact?"

So boyish he appeared, and his face so a-gleam as with some hidden mischief, that Miss Pembroke relented, and deigned to smile.

"Sir, your question is as foolish as foolish can be. How can I make a pact until I know the terms? Do you take me for a ninny?"

"Rather a Portia, if you will allow the compliment. . . . I may linger hereabout for several months."

"Well, sir?"

"I am a gentleman without employment so long as I tarry."

"Proceed."

"I have a fair intellect, some courage, and much bodily strength."

"And a perfectly lovely dog."

"And if you were not you, I would shake you soundly for impertinence to your elders!"

"Then why not come to the point?" laughed she of the saucy tongue. "You know I am consumed with curiosity, and you are deliberately provoking me!"

"I am merely paving the way for my proposition, which is as follows: I will engage to fetch Margot LaTour safely away from the villains into whose hands she has fallen, if you will be my good, close friend, call me Saul, and allow me to call you Dorothy."

Now a bright, happy gleam came into the lady's eyes, and she caught her breath sharply.

"Oh, Saul!" she murmured. And again: "Saul! Saul! Saul!"

"Then you agree, little Dorothy?" he questioned, eagerly bending forward.

"Your contract said naught of a qualifying diminutive, sir," she replied, her lids dropping, "but I think I will agree, because—I love Margot much. . . . And are you sure you will succeed? 'Tis a dangerous task, and first you must find her prison."

"If you will have faith in me I will surely succeed," declared Brentley, a touch of tenderness softening his words. "It is not the spirit of adventure alone which impels me to undertake this rescue."

So low and sweet had his voice become that Miss Pembroke felt her cheeks tingle, and her composure was direly threatened. But the patient

Did had now surmounted the hill and broke into a trot, and this simple fact saved the situation.

"There is New Market!" cried Dorothy. "Now I must buy some sugar, and some goods from which to make shifts for our pickaninnies, then we'll go back to my father with your story and your offer of help."

"But not our compact!" protested Brentley. "That is between us alone."

"That is between us alone, Saul," she answered, smiling at him comrade-wise.

Guiding the wagon alongside a porch fronting a low building to which they had come, Dorothy jumped out and ran inside.

Saul looked about him.

The place was not a village, and scarcely a hamlet. The general store at which they had stopped seemed to be the only one there. A few humble residences were visible. From a tumble-down shack a short distance ahead came the ring of iron, indicating a smithy. Diagonally across the road from where the young man sat was a story-and-a-half wooden structure with sloping eaves. The roof was of clapboards, and so overgrown with moss that it seemed as if covered with green sod. Just one side the door was a huge stump, long since divested of all bark, which leaned at quite an angle. This, reflected our hero, was doubtless "the public kept by Cadwallader Hull," of which the skins-and-leather man had spoken.

"So," mused Brentley, "while my lady shops I will go take a glass of something with Master Hull."

And leaping down, he crossed the road and entered the tavern.

The room was poorly lighted by one small window with grimy panes, and held but two people. One of these was an uncouth individual in non-

descript garments. He sat in a big armchair, with extended legs and head thrown back. Despite the hour he was sound asleep, and snoring loudly. The other person was the landlord, who, back of the bar, was busily engaged polishing a pewter mug. He was a rotund, rubicund fellow, with bald head and broad smile, though there was no apparent cause for mirth. Saul drew a coin from his waistcoat pocket and walked toward him.

"A swallow of your best ale, Master Hull, if you please," he said.

"Ha! 'Master Hull!'" exclaimed mine host, his smile expanding to a grin. "You know me, eh? Ever'body knows Cadwallader Hull o' the Leaning Stump! Ale, is it? Aye, the best that ever run down your throttle, or I'm a common liar. You shall drink it out o' this great mug, too, because you called me 'Master Hull.' I'll prove it to 'em yet." He turned to a large cask with a wooden spigot, talking all the time. "You, sir, bein' a stranger from God-knows-where, can't know of the argymints that go on in this very room when the boys come in for a drop o' somethin'. . . . There, young master. If you don't say it's the grandes' ale that ever tickled your tongue you can keep your money, and I'm a common liar to boot. . . . The argymints that go on. Come two more days, for a week solid we've had it up who's the fust man o' this here section; meanin', o' course, New Market and the adj'inin' country, and meanin' by 'fust man' the best and wides' known. . . . Another mug? Ha! Ha! What'd I tell you? The like's not found in the whole state, if I do say it. But a man to do well must look fust to the quality of his goods, and then he must be square and honest. . . . Well, o' course some say this man and some say that, but *I* say as how Cadwallader Hull

is the fust man o' this section. And when the boys drop in to-night I'll have one on 'em, for two minutes agone didn't you, a teetotal stranger from God-knows-where, walk up to this bar and say: 'A swallow of your best ale, Master Hull'? I'll prove to 'em who's the fust man!"

He smoothed the apron over his big round front, and rubbed his hands gleefully.

"Your brew certainly is delicious," agreed Saul, wondering if the man's tongue wagged in this manner for all his customers.

"Thankee kindly, sir! Thankee kindly! And if I may ask, how far have you traveled, sir?"

"Oh, sixty miles, more or less."

"A teetotal stranger?"

"Yes; I was never here before."

"Sixty mile or more—a teetotal stranger—never here before—and walk up to my bar and call me 'Master Hull!' I'll prove it to 'em. I'll show the boys who's the fust man."

Saul leisurely filled his pipe, walked to the door and looked out, saw that the wagon was still standing before the store, and said:

"I met one by the river this morning who told _____,"

"Never mind what anybody told you!" broke in mine host, with upthrown hands, a swift alarm transforming his merry features into an expression almost grotesque. "I don't want to hear—I won't hear! Tell me of something else—yourself, your journey! I need this story for the boys— of how you came from more than sixty mile away and called me 'Master Hull' the same as one o' them!"

"I see— I see," smiled Brentley. "And you may tell them with a clear conscience if I say no more. Very well; I am silent. But who is this that slumbers here when most people are awake?"

Cadwallader Hull waddled around his bar and took up a position by Saul's side before he answered.

"That is Noey Mole, the preacher."

"Preacher, did you say?"

Mine host placed his hands on his fat sides and chuckled gleefully.

"I said that is Noey Mole, the preacher, and I say it ag'in."

Once more his purplish jowls shook with laughter.

Saul regarded the bibulous nose of the noisy sleeper, and his woefully sad attire.

"Pray explain to me how that comes, Master Hull?" he said. "I would call yonder fellow a tramp."

"And you would call main right, young sir. A wastrel he is, and he tinkers with boots and saddles for a livin'; his livin' bein' all he can drink each day. Hark ye!" a squat, fat thumb prodded Brentley's ribs gently, "he says hisseff he was a preacher once, and that good liquor took his job away from him. Sure it is he's heavy on the Scriptur, and can say it to you by the hour. His strong point now is to argy in favor o' drink, and he'll p'int to passages in Holy Writ to s'port 'im."

"Hm-m-m," mused Saul; "I never heard quite the like."

"They say as how he preaches yet sometimes, all to hisseff. He sleeps in his box of a shop, a stone's cast down the road, and Hefty Will, the smith, tells as how he heard 'im one night about cock-crow. Will's home is just across the road, and Noey was a-talkin' and a-harang'in' so loud it woke 'im up. So he dresses, does Will, and slips out to look about the matter. And th'oo the windy he saw 'im, a-th'owin' his arms and

a-bowin' and a-perkin' his head, the same like people was a-settin' and a-listenin'. Noey was talkin' 'loud and strong, and Will says 'twas a main fine sermon he heard that night, 'bout the end o' the world and the Day o' Jedgegment."

"Where did he come from, I wonder?"

"That no one knows. For a half score o' years he's tinkered with boots and saddles and sich in his little box of a shop a stone's cast from this door. He calls hisseff the preacher when he's in 'is liquor, and that's most o' the time. It's fair amazin' how much he can hold."

The sound of voices floated in from across the road; one the treble of a woman.

Saul turned with alacrity.

"I must be going, Master Hull, but I will see you again. Your ale is excellent, and I shall want another mug soon."

"Aye, none better can be brewed, or I'm a common liar. Thankee kindly, and a fair mornin' to you, young sir!"

Miss Pembroke was already on the seat of the spring wagon and looking about perplexedly when Brentley issued from the tavern. He hurried to her side.

"What, sir; tippling so early?" she queried, drawing Did's head around.

"Only a mug of ale to pass the time, Dorothy," he replied, taking infinite relish in using her name unrebuked. "I find the landlord of the Leaning Stump a quaint chap, and garrulous as a crow. Now, just to try out our compact, suppose you prove to me that you have not forgotten who I am."

"I never break my word,——"

"Well?" eagerly.

"S-a-u-l."

"That's cheating."

"It isn't."

"It is."

"It *isn't!*" with the impact of a sole on the wagon bed.

"You promised to call me Saul," with assumed doggedness.

"I didn't promise to keep that word on my tongue perpetually."

"But just now you avoided it—cruelly and maliciously."

"I wanted to show you I could spell."

"Very well. Spell 'prevaricate.'"

"You are horrid, Saul Brentley, and I despise you! Now in punishment for your offense I shall not say another word to you until we come to the spot where Did stepped off the road."

And forthwith and immediately Miss Dorothy Mehitabel Pembroke compressed her pretty lips, pulled her blue sunbonnet over her prettier eyes, and gave her undivided attention to the horse, nor could all the importunities of the young gentleman by her side gain a word from her until they had reached the point which she had designated. Then:

"You have been in disgrace," she said, turning to him with grave eyes. "I should think you would feel very much ashamed to have to stand in a figurative corner, as you have, because of improper speech." Here her mouth shaped to a smile, and she shook her head. "Saul, Saul, you naughty boy!"

Brentley kept his hands on his knees by a great effort of will.

"Tell me, please," he begged, "is coquetry natural or acquired?"

"La, sir!" with a toss of her head which sent the sunbonnet to the back of her neck, "what would the likes of me, a simple country girl,

know of coquetry? Besides, 'tis something I've always thought beneath a real lady. Don't you think so?"

"I can scarcely agree with you. I believe it is as natural to a woman as teeth and eyes, and quite as necessary to her moral balance as the others are to her physical appearance. Imagine how bereft you would feel without it."

"I? Oh, sir, how can you say it?"

And from her fringed eyes straightway there sped a half-dozen shafts which Saul made no effort to parry.

Coming to the end of a long row of locust trees bordering the roadside, the young man saw once more the house which had attracted his attention when he came up from the river that morning.

"Who lives in the house, yonder, Dorothy?"

"Captain Jonathan Pembroke, his sister Mehitabel, and his daughter Dorothy, three cats which belong to the aforesaid sister Mehitabel, and a broken-winged mockingbird which belongs to daughter Dorothy."

Saul cast a look of suspicion at the speaker, but there was nothing about her face to indicate that she was other than serious. She was flapping a line at a horsefly on Did's shining back, and when she presently tumbled the little pest into the dust she gave a jump and a chirp of delight.

"See!" she cried, with childish animation. "Did knew I was after that fly which was biting him, and he didn't move any faster although I rapped him sharply."

"It would be a foolish horse that would hurry in your company, anyway. . . . But I was thinking of your household. Its personnel is the same as mine. There's dad, and Aunt Emmeline, and myself."

"It is a coinci— oh, yonder's father!"

They were drawing near the front of the dwelling, which sat rather back from the road, and Saul observed that a figure had come out upon the lower portico.

"How glad he'll be to meet you and hear the news about dear Margot. And how we must plan! To think she may be with us in a day or two! Get up, Did! Lazybones! Get up! Remember, Saul, you've promised to bring her back to us!"

And before the flushed, eager face she thrust toward him Saul suddenly found himself dumb, and could only gaze at her in reverential wonder, and nod his head like a silly schoolboy when promising to be good. And directly they had drawn up to an old-fashioned wooden stile set in the plank yard fence, and Mistress Dorothy, casting lines to the wind, was up and out and down, and across the lawn toward her leisurely approaching sire. A half-grown negro appeared from somewhere and stood waiting to take charge of the horse. So our hero bestirred himself and got together his bundles and his stick. Then he stepped onto the stile, whither Dhu had preceded him, and patiently abided developments.

Dorothy had met her father, and was evidently pouring her news into his ears, for presently the old gentleman stopped, placed a hand on each of her shoulders, and standing her at arms' length, propounded some question which Saul did not hear. Upon receiving her answer he wheeled, and arm-in-arm they advanced toward the stile. As Saul came down the steps to meet them, he saw that Captain Pembroke was low and stumpy of build, and that his genuine, strong face was fringed with a short beard.

"This is wonderful news you bring us, Mr. Brentley!" he exclaimed, grasping the young fel-

low's hand warmly and starting back toward the house, leading his guest. "We'll go in and have it all over. Margot must be half crazy, poor little chit! . . . Brentley—haven't I heard the name?"

He turned from Saul to Dorothy as though for corroboration.

"I can't say, father. I'm sure I never heard it till this morning."

"The farm's near Hillsboro, in Galloway county," volunteered Saul. "It was originally a Revolutionary grant, and has never been out of the family."

"I don't know," mused the captain, with furrowed forehead. "Seems to me I knew or heard of somebody by that name maybe twenty years ago—but it don't matter," waving his hand in a gesture of dismissal. "Come in, young man."

The three crossed the portico and entered the broad, cool hall.

"Hittie!" burst in stentorian tones from the captain's deep chest. "Ho-o-o—Hittie!"

"Auntie is busy this time of the morning, father," interrupted Dorothy, placing her hand on his arm. "I'll call Judy to show Mr. Brentley to his room."

"Pray don't go to that trouble," broke in Saul. "I can tarry with you only till late afternoon, at the longest, and I shall rid myself of travel stains by using that wash-pan I see by the waterbucket on yonder side porch. Allow me, please!"

This to his fair companion, for he knew that Captain Pembroke would not lightly transgress the rigid rules of hospitality.

"If you prefer," she said, with a slight nod.

Captain Pembroke gave a snort, whether of displeasure or assent Saul did not know, and led the way to the washstand on the porch. Here sat

a cedar bucket with a wooden cover, and a capacious tin washpan. Against a post a gourd dipper hung on a nail. Saul quaffed the cool water thirstily, and bathed his head and face and arms with a sense of great relief. Then he rubbed dry with the home-made linen towel his host gave him, poured Dhu, who had come up sniffing, a generous drink in the pan, and followed the master back to the hall, and from thence into a combined sitting and bedroom on the left.

Dorothy came in at once, followed by a feminine duplicate of the captain whom she introduced as "her Aunt Mehitabel." Saul caught the fun imps dancing in the girl's eyes as she said this, and knew she was thinking of their discussion of that name on the road, but he bowed right gallantly over the plump, purple hand held out to him, and murmured his pleasure at the introduction. Then as the three gathered about him, an eager, anticipative group, it dawned clearly upon the young gentleman that he must give some reason for leaving home and that mysterious night journey down the river, the consequences of which had brought him to this moment. He could not tell the truth. Never, with this dainty Dorothy beaming expectantly upon him, could he say that a barmaid with coarse black hair had been the cause of his temporary exile. For, alas! Saul's conception of feminine loveliness had undergone a complete reversal within little more than twelve hours, and Jinsy's gypsy charms seemed cheap and tawdry to him now. They were as ironstone china to Sevres; as a sunflower to a rose.

"Now then, let's hear your tale!" burst in Captain Jonathan, bluffly, as Saul sat prodding his brain for the most proper lie. "How in mercy's name did you chance to come by the river instead of overland, to begin with? And how is it you

travel with a stick and a pack, like a foreign peddler?"

"Brother!" exclaimed Aunt Mehitabel, casting him a glance of reproach mingled with shame, and recrossing her hands on her broad lap.

Dorothy giggled.

"Just a lark, sir," answered Saul, light coming in the nick of time. "There's a roamish streak in our blood, and a hankering for untrodden ways. It's true dad's chair-fast with gout, but he's better, and the plantation's in good hands. I wanted an adventure, and I took it—Dhu and I."

He pointed toward the hall, where, through the open doorway, the big collie lay stretched, his head down, his eyes on his master.

"A lovely creature," purred Aunt Mehitabel, "and I'm sure as loyal as can be."

"The tale, Mr. Brentley, if you please," again interposed Captain Jonathan. . . . "All dogs are loyal, Hittie," he continued, in an audible aside to his sister. "It's their nature, and I wouldn't suppose this one was an exception. . . Now, Mr. Brentley?"

So Saul, with a quick look at Dorothy, who sat with her hand over her mouth and her eyes slanted at Aunt Mehitabel, began and told his tale. Apart from the initial lie, he told it with the utmost veracity, and the unbroken silence on the part of his auditors was a tribute to his narrative powers. When he had finished—

"Mack Leek's got her—the hound!" burst from Captain Jonathan, while Aunt Mehitabel gave a gasp and a murmur and smoothed her dress over her knees.

"But Mr. Brentley's going to find her!" broke in Dorothy, with child-like confidence. "He has promised!"

Her father did not reply, but frowned straight in front of him and pulled gently at his grayish whiskers.

"How far away are these cliffs, sir?" asked Saul, presently.

"Nine or ten miles, and it's a rough, wild country. You've got a man's job before you, young fellow."

Aunt Mehitabel arose with the softly spoken excuse that she must see about the preparation of dinner, and left the room. Father, daughter and guest continued to discuss the all-important topic until the mid-day meal was announced. When this was over, Captain Jonathan departed horseback to keep an engagement at a neighboring farm, while Saul and Dorothy, chaperoned by Dhu, wandered into the orchard at one side of the house. Here they strolled the greater part of the afternoon, Dorothy insisting time and again that Saul should confide his plans to her, while he kept repeating that it was impossible to formulate plans in her company. Thereat they came near to having a miniature quarrel, Dorothy declaring that, as the rescue of Margot was of paramount importance, and as Saul could not think in her—Dorothy's—presence, then he had better leave her; Saul refusing in turn to do any such thing. It was late afternoon before they came to an agreement. Saul would go and busy his mind about Margot, providing Dorothy would drive him to New Market. So the patient Did plodded back to the little hamlet, while on the seat of the wagon behind him two young people continued the tactics begun that morning in the oldest game in the world.

"Make your plan to-night, Master Brentley," admonished Dorothy, with lifted forefinger as,

the journey done at last, Saul stood by the wagon wheel.

"You shall have your friend back, sweet Dorothy," answered the young man, and suddenly he took his cap off and bowed his head before her, holding it thus, as though half ashamed of his temerity.

There was a movement from the seat, and something rested lightly upon his hair.

"My blessing go with you, Saul, and prayers for your success. Be careful, though—for me!"

Then even as he strove with a glad cry to grasp the hand she had placed upon his head, she drew swiftly back, struck the astonished Did smartly with her whip, turned in a dangerously narrow cricle, and started home. She never looked back, though he watched her till she was over the hill. Then he sighed, much as any swain would have done under the circumstances, and with bent head and tight lips walked slowly down the road.

VIII

Conveying the reader to the inn of The Limping Dog, where he is presented to divers personalities, and bringing into the tale a gentleman from Philadelphia.

Three miles from New Market, on the Cedarton road, was an old brick building which combined the utilities of post-house and tavern. How long it had stood there no one knew exactly, but its foundations were so sunken that it appeared as some huge and strange excrescence growing out of the earth, rather than as a house built upon it. A grass-grown yard of fair dimensions lay between house and road, and this yard was bisected by a worn flagstone walk. An ancient hackberry tree grew near the southwestern corner of the house, some of its limbs overspreading the weather-stained roof. Depending from a rusty iron bar at the corner of a wall was a board, with some almost indistinguishable lines traced upon it. To the newcomer this sign meant nothing, but old residents would stoutly aver that the Limping Dog was still plainly visible. For these had looked at the crude representation of a hound with one foreleg upheld which used to deck the board until, though rain and frost had all but effaced the figure, it yet dwelt within their minds in all its early beauty.

The inn of the Limping Dog was kept by Manse and Moll Higbee, husband and wife. Manse was a weazened, little old man, loud-mouthed and trif-

ling. He wasted a vast amount of energy bustling about doing nothing, and labored under the delusion that his brain and his toil kept the business going. He was continually dashing here and there as though each second were the last at his disposal, and his thin, high voice could be heard all day long in vociferous address or colloquy. The only real work he was ever known to do was assisting the hostler to change horses. His main diet was rum-and-water; his dissipation, checker playing.

Moll was the presiding genius of this "public" nestled at the foot of Johnson's Hill, as the long rise in the road at this point was known. Low and broad was Moll, dish-faced and green-eyed—a truly terrible combination. But she smiled habitually, an expression doubtless acquired by many years' truckling to trade, and she was quick and efficient. Something of a fighter, too, was this big-hipped landlady, for she had been known to knock a drunken wayfarer down with a billet for refusing to pay his bill, and her vocabulary, when angry, did not always embrace the terms employed in polite conversation. Her special province was the bar, where she served all thirsty comers deftly, throwing in a jest or quip by way of creating good feeling, and mixing special drinks with a perfection born of careful practice. Nothing of a prude was Mistress Higbee, for she had grown used to the careless talk of men, and often, while pretending occupation among the mugs and casks, she would listen to the rough jokes bandied about the room, and turn her head to smile. But from this it must not be inferred that she was loose of morals, for of a truth she was not. Loyal to little Manse she was, although she would cuff him out of the way sometimes, much as she would a dog or a cat. But laxity of speech was very com-

mon in those days, and Moll wisely concluded it was better to smile than to frown, providing tongues did not grow actually vile. In that event, she would probably inform the offender that there was a pen of hogs in the barn lot, and that if he did not mend his manners he would do well to seek their company.

There was no more popular place for rest and refreshment in all the countryside than the Limping Dog. The traveling public made extra effort to reach it to pass the night, and it was a veritable haven for the neighborhood folk, who wanted a glass of something and a chat before bedtime.

Early in the night of that day upon which Saul and Dorothy met, the customary habitues of the Limping Dog's tap-room began to assemble. Darkness brought with it a penetrating chilliness, the season not being advanced far enough for the day's warmth to linger after sunset, and in consequence a cheery fire of hickory was blazing in the broad chimney. Here swung a pot and crane, for there might come a call for hot drinks, and the water must be ready.

On a rough settle at one side the huge fireplace sat a figure which seemed several decades behind the period. It wore a three cornered hat, and the hair, which was a grayish-white, was grown long, and plaited in the form of a queue of an earlier era. A stock, a red coat much worn and patched in places with different shades of the original color, knickerbockers, yarn stockings and buckle shoes completed the apparel. Rather rotund of body was this individual, smooth and ruddy of face, and he smoked a long-stemmed pipe with a small bowl. Although a regular caller at the tap-room, he had little to say, and that little was voiced only after liberal potions. But at intervals during the evening his voice would rise, addressed

to no one in particular. "My name's Ephri-ham Stout, and I'm a Henglishman. Long live the King!" When he had said this, he would wave his pipe in the air and relapse into bibulous revery or semi-coma. Whether he was English-born or not no one knew. He had drifted to the neighborhood the year following the close of the war of 1812, with a pack on a stick. He had worked for hire a number of years, gradually acquired a little property and some live stock, then had built a two-room cabin. He had seemed a sober, working sort, but upon a night he had astounded those who foregathered at the Limping Dog by bursting into the room drunk as a lord, attired as a fox hunting English squire, and loudly and persistently declared his nationality to those assembled. Consternation and amazement reigned in the tap-room that night. Loyal Americans were they all, and the sight of a red coat, coupled to the sound of blustering words, placed the transformed laborer in momentary jeopardy. It was Uncle Jacky Bibb, the village patriarch, who saved the situation. While the newcomer made an uncertain course for the bar, and the men began to mutter and shuffle their feet, Uncle Jacky rose up from his seat in the ingle, by the tallow lamp which was kept for his especial use, and thumping the floor in front of him with his crook-handled cane, shuffled up to the metamorphosed laborer. Then, bending forward with both hands clasped on his stick, he spat to one side, and asked in a dry, tiny voice:

"Bain't you Eph Stout?"

He of the pompous air leaned on the bar and blinked, but did not reply.

Uncle Jacky lifted a bent, shaking forefinger and tapped him on the chest.

"I say, bain't you Eph *Stout*?"

But strong waters held Stout's brain, and he was not to be daunted. He drew himself up with uncertain dignity.

"My name's Ephri-ham Stout, and I'm a Henglishman. Long live the King!"

Uncle Jacky turned and leered about with rheumy eyes. Then he cackled in the roof of his mouth.

"You be plain Eph Stout, an' a drunk lout, an' you bain't got no king!"

With that he cackled again, shriller than before, gazed triumphantly about him, and hobbled back to his chair amid the laughter of the crowd.

Stout worked during the day, like his neighbors, but after nightfall he would don the garb in which we now find him, and hie to the rough oak settle to drink himself into a state of supreme disregard for his surroundings or his associates.

Across from him, where the iron tallow lamp was stuck in a crack in the masonry of the chimney, was the throne of Uncle Jacky Bibb, autocrat and arbiter. This ancient person's home was only a short distance down the road, where he dwelt in perpetual turmoil with a consort only a few years his junior. Between sunset and dark, as regular as the falling of that twilight, Uncle Jacky would betake himself to the Higbees, there to indulge mildly in a specially brewed liquor, smoke a little stone pipe holding about a thimbleful and a half, and settle disputes. A mite of a figure was Uncle Jacky, scarcely five feet from his soles to his bald crown, and his limbs and body had shrunk under his fourscore and fifteen years till his weight was little more than a healthy child of ten. At times he would indulge in a game of checkers, and it is so we find him this evening, vis-a-vis with Manse Higbee, a home-made board upon their joined knees whose darker squares

had been carefully stained with juice from the pokeberry.

Moll was back in the kitchen scolding a negro wench about the supper dishes. Her angry tones floated in to the men, but they paid no attention. Women's tongues had clacked since Solomon's day, and doubtless long before, and it was a wise man who heeded them not.

"Yo've busted yo' king line, Uncle Jacky!" piped Manse, twisting nervously in his seat and pulling the lobe of his right ear.

"So I hev, son," shrilled Uncle Jacky; "an' d'rec'ly I'll bust you!"

"Ketch yo' rabbit afore you skin 'im, says I," retorted Manse, and his knee gave a jerk.

"Set still! An' don't try to shake my men out o' their spots! Play fa'r, sonny."

"I couldn't he'p it. You know how I jake since the chills an' ager got me. I ain't tryin' to cheat."

Again his finger and thumb tweaked his ear-lobe, while his shoe-button eyes eagerly scanned the relative positions of the opposing forces.

"You bain't so bad, I 'low," retorted Uncle Jacky, "but I were playin' checkers when yo' pa was a brat."

Then, with a series of hen-like clucks betokening satisfaction, he calmly jumped three of Manse's men and landed on the king-line.

"Cap that feller befo' you furgit it," he added.

But the little innkeeper was fain to contest this move. It was too sweeping and demoralizing in its effect to be accepted meekly.

"Hold on, Uncle Jacky! Hold on!" he cried, spreading his thin hands over the board as though about to deliver an incantation or work a spell.

"Do that over ag'in! Put them men back!"

But the old man's fingers only closed the tighter

over his captured pieces, and he wagged his head.

"'Twere a' hones' jump, sonny, an' I never gives up a took man. It's yo' move."

But losing a game of checkers meant loss of sleep to Manse, and he continued to protest.

"One 's here—an' one 's here——"

The tips of two seamed, dirt-grained fingers rested spraddling upon the board.

"An' t'other 'n," gibed Uncle Jacky, "whur 's it?"

"You couldn't 'a' done it!" affirmed Manse, doggedly, wriggling in his chair. "I watches my men, an I ain't been jumped three times since I growed whiskers!"

The old fellow chuckled gleefully.

"I said cap that feller, sonny. Mebbe in another forty year you can learn to play."

Manse scratched his head and studied the board.

The door opened and two men came in, bringing with them a sharp gust of cool air. None of the inmates of the room paid any heed whatever to the arrivals, who sauntered to the bar, talking cattle. Presently the shorter of the two rapped with his knuckles and voiced his thirst. Manse, striving to convince himself that he had been cheated, heard but did not get up. The man who wanted to be served rapped louder, and bellowed good-naturedly:

"D'you want me to go 'round an' help myseff?"

His tones must have carried to the kitchen, for in dashed Moll with a clatter of stiff-soled shoes. Apprehending the situation the moment she entered the door, she thrust at her spouse's head as she hurried past—a blow which he ducked and avoided—and bustled back among the kegs and mugs and bottles.

"A triflin' man is a sore trial," she averred, drying her red, beefy hands on her apron. "Now

what shall it be, gentlemen? Ale, rum, whisky? Ah, Mr. Pottle"—to the shorter and older of her customers—"I know your weakness for ale. An' you, Mr. Sammy; what will you be havin' this chilly evenin'? A sip o' stout, or some o' my own grape wine, six year in the cellar?"

The men gave their orders, and just then the door was quickly opened and shut, and with a suddenness of a Jack-in-the-box a long, lank figure appeared in the room. He executed a jiggling step, half pirouette and half shuffle, paused with the sole of his right foot resting flat against his left ankle, bowed with his hand on his thin chest, and spoke solemnly and sonorously:

"O I am a saddler and preacher in one,
I mend broken harness and deeply I think;
I study the Word like a son-of-a-gun,
For there I get license to swill a good drink."

This unique piece of doggerel from the startling apparition produced no effect whatever upon any who heard it. The Henglishman silently and solemnly raised the quart measure which rested by his side and quaffed from its contents; the game of draughts continued in abeyance; and Moll went on attending her customers, who had not even turned.

The figure in the door stared about for a moment with eyes which were strained and bleared. The mark of drink lay heavy on him. Back of the mask which a bibulous nature had placed upon his features was a certain nobility of expression, blurred and almost hidden though it was. It showed in his high, good forehead, well chiseled nose, and even in his sodden gaze. A sense of humor must have been inherent, for a tricky smile hovered about his mouth, whose sensitive outlines

had never been supplanted by loose-lipped depravity. He spoke again, standing easily now, finger around his chin, elbow in palm.

"We read in Genesis that Noey planted a vineyard."

Soft and full the words came, and they bore a quality of sweetness oddly at variance with the man's outcast condition.

"Did he plant this vineyard for shade, gentlemen, or to give employment to Shem, Ham and Japhet, lest perchance they get into mischief? I trow not. In fact, the text is very explicit as to why he planted it. It was to raise grapes, that he might make wine, that he might get drunk. Now my name too is Noey—Noey Mole, as you all know. I plant no vineyard, but like my illustrious forebear, I get drunk. Mistress Moll, a bumper of your best."

Concluding this brief and astounding harangue, the vagrant tripped forward and twirled a coin upon the bar.

"Ale, is it, Big Sam Pottle?" he cried, cheerily, clapping the shorter and older of the men on the shoulder. "And same for you, Little Sam Pottle?" turning to grasp the arm of the taller and younger man. "Drink hearty! It's all good for the body and it can't touch the soul, for that's immortal. Ha! Ha! 'A certain rich husbandman planted him a vineyard and went into a far country.' It runs all through the Word, gentlemen. They loved it of old time, and we love it now, and others will love it when we are dust. Ah! Mistress Moll, thanks! The first health's to you!"

Baring his head, Noey Mole bowed deeply, then standing erect, drank gallantly to the big-hipped, dish-faced woman as though she had been a Venus.

Then, moving agilely and lightly, he went and squatted on his heels by the checker players.

The Pottles, father and son, began their second mug. For miles thereabout they were known as Big Sam Pottle and Little Sam Pottle. The queer part of it was that Little Sam was larger than Big Sam. But the name by which the son had been called in infancy and childhood stuck to him as he grew, until, when he could almost chin his sire, he was still Little Sam Pottle, and would likely remain so all his life, for the folk of that day and time were not given to change. A short way up the Cedarton road from the public the grazing lands of the Pottles began, for they were well-to-do traders and drovers, albeit of scanty education, and plain as the soil they trod. Many acres of beautiful rolling ground were theirs, and in the spreading fields and pastures were cattle and horses which were numbered by the hundred. Almost every evening, when the day's work was ended, the pair would ride down to the Higbee's to chat, listen to any chance news, and take a swallow of something. Good men and true were these sturdy husbandmen, Big Sam standing six feet and Little Sam six feet four. Broad-faced and mild-mannered, somewhat slow of speech, but honest to the core and fair in their dealings.

Moll, seeing that her customers were taking their time with the second mug, slipped out of the room. When she was gone——

"There's a hoss missin' out o' Sinkhole Field," said Little Sam, slowly, shoving nearer his father.

"Maybe you overlooked 'im," returned Big Sam, but his thick brows went together.

The other shook his head.

"I counted 'em twice. It's the bay with the white stockin's."

"Mebbe he's fell in," suggested the older

man, but the look of concern on the rugged face deepened. "I've been 'tendin' to fill up that hole."

"He never fell in, 'cause I looked to see. None o' that bunch are jumpin' hosses. He's gone."

Big Sam remained silent, frowning at his mug.

"He's stole, pap."

"Has there been any traders 'bout lately, that you know of?"

"No, but there's somebody always about who'd like to have that bay. He's easy wuth two hundred."

Big Sam shifted, and looked around over his shoulder. Manse had given up the disputed game at last and had persuaded Uncle Jacky to start another, while Ephraim Stout sat with half-closed eyes staring at the fire.

"He's never bothered us before."

"I'll bet you a heifer he's got that white stock-in' bay. This county'll be better off when it's shet o' Mack Leek."

"Whut you goin' to do?"

"Look about to-morrer. There'll be tracks, I reck'n. I don't 'tend to be robbed without puttin' up a fight. . . . Howdy, Mordy."

As he was speaking the door had been gently opened, and the skins-and-leather man stepped noiselessly in, followed by his four-footed companion. Obedient to a gesture from his master, the bear slunk over to the nearest corner and sat down, and Mordecai Fode came forward and shook hands with the two men.

"Putty fur from home, ain't you, Mordy?" asked Big Sam, heartily. "Whut you doin' slip-pin' roun' up here at Higbee's this time o' night? Have a little somethin' to knock the chill off?"

The philosopher shook his head and smiled.

"No journey is too long when undertaken in the

interest of justice and mercy. I came to ask if there be any news of the missing maiden."

"None that I've heard," returned Big Sam, "an' you may be sure the word would've spread like wildfire if anybody'd found out anything. This carryin' off o' that gal's a bad business, an' somebody ought 'o suffer hard."

"Somebody will suffer hard before all's done," declared Little Sam, thrusting his hands in his pockets and leaning his back against the bar. "You'd think there wasn't no law this side o' Frankfort."

He dropped his chin and frowned at the floor.

"Has no one any notion who the culprit might be?" asked Mordecai Fode, with the simplicity and earnestness of a child. "I live apart and alone, and do not hear the talk. I stopped for a minute in New Market to ask Cadwallader Hull, but he waved me off and said he couldn't afford to talk. I didn't understand him."

The skins-and-leather man turned from one to the other perplexedly.

"Hull's thinkin' of his livin' as well as his hide," retorted Big Sam; "but there's no use callin' names till somethin' is proved. I favor askin' the Governor to take a hand in this kidnappin' business. It's a crime ag'in the State."

"It's somethin' we men ought 'o handle," broke in Little Sam. "We ain't done enough. The gal's hid somewheres nigh, an' ever'body ought 'o knock off work till she's found."

Three blasts from a bugle, the first two short and the last long and clear, came drifting faintly but plainly into the room.

"It's Deef Dick," said Big Sam, leisurely pulling a huge silver watch from his waistcoat pocket. "He's half a' hour late."

The blasts came again, a little more distinct.

This time all present heard the clarion-like sound. Manse caked his head, then jumped to his feet with such alacrity that board and checkers fell to the floor. Grabbing a candle-lantern from a peg on the wall, he lighted it with a splinter from a billet and rushed outside, calling his stable-boy at every jump. The man on the settle, who had been half asleep, jerked his sagging head backward with the action of one suddenly aroused, gasped and blinked, then cried loudly:

"My name is Ephri-ham Stout, and I'm a Henglishman. Long live the King!"

He waved his pipe, and picking up the quart measure drank from it, then set it down and closed his heavy eyes. Whereupon Noey Mole, with many gestures and grimaces, arose upon his toes, circled around the room to the back of the settle, and audaciously helped himself from Mr. Stout's private cup. The two drovers chuckled lazily at this antic, while Uncle Jacky Bibb arose to his feet with the assistance of his cane on one hand and the rocks of the fireplace on the other, muttering wrathfully all the while because of his opponent's abrupt departure.

Now came the shouting of a semi-ribald song without, which was presently drowned in the clatter of hoofs and grind of wheels as the stage coach swept down the last incline of Johnson's Hill, to halt with a whining of brakes in front of the inn. There were shouts, some laughter, the sound of moving feet and jingling traces, for this was a post-house where horses were changed.

"Wonder if Dick's fetched anybody for the Limpin' Dog this trip?" idly inquired Big Sam of his offspring.

"Travel's a bit slow this time o' the year,"



answered Little Sam, "but 'pears to me I hear a strange voice out there."

He had scarcely spoken when Manse appeared, his hands full of luggage and his tongue going. Behind him came two others. One was Deef Dick, a trunk balanced on his shoulder, and the other was a slender, dark young man wearing a light cloak of rich material. Manse deposited his luggage and dashed into the rear hall crying for Moll, while the stage driver eased the trunk onto the floor and waddled to the bar. He was a sturdy fellow of uncertain age, with brown and wrinkled face and searching eyes—the eyes of one who finds it difficult to hear. The stranger bowed slightly to the Pottles, gave an almost imperceptible shrug, then strode to the fireplace and held his hands to the blaze. Wonderfully white and slender were these hands, and something blue and green and white sparkled upon the finger of one. As he stood there the faint odor of patchouli began to diffuse itself through the smoke-hung room.

Little Sam turned to Big Sam with his right nostril twisted and the corner of his mouth awry.

"'Bout bedtime, pap?" he asked, significantly.

"Time we git home," agreed Big Sam, and each giving a parting glance at the silent figure before the fire, they passed out.

Uncle Jacky Bibb had been standing with dropped lower lip, staring at the newcomer. The sound of the door closing as the Pottles withdrew seemed to rouse him.

"Stranger, bain't you?" he inquired, his voice cutting the silence shrilly.

The young man turned, revealing a face almost pallid in whiteness, in which shone large, black, liquid eyes. He nodded gravely, though something like a smile flitted across his lips.

"Be you tarryin' a while?" pursued his inquisitor.

"A while—yes," replied the stranger, with a slightly foreign accent.

Uncle Jacky stretched out his hand and picked up a worn and faded dolman from the back of the chair he had recently quitted.

"He'p me on wi' this, young man. I be gittin' a trifle old," he said.

Courteously and gently the newcomer fitted the garment over the stooped and narrow shoulders.

"I must be goin' now, or the rheumatics'll lay hold on me," confided Uncle Jacky. "Thanky, young man. An' be you tarryin', I'll see you ag'in."

The thump of his cane and the slither of his feet followed, and as he disappeared round-faced Moll bustled in and dropped a curtsy, while Manse, trailing her, slid behind the bar to minister to the needs of Deef Dick.

"Room an' bed an' a bite is it, sir?" queried Mistress Higbee, smoothing her sleek hair with both palms.

"If you please, madame," with an inclination of the head. "But first may I inquire if I am not near the home of one Captain Pembroke?"

"He lives just t'other side o' New Market—a matter o' four mile. But the stage don't pass his house," she added, hurriedly, foreseeing an immediate departure.

"I shall remain here to-night, and probably for and definite time. There is no news of—of the lost girl, Margot LaTour?"

The stranger leaned forward with the question, his face grave and his eyes pained.

"No. It is said they wait for money. . . . Poor girl!"

The young man drew back, and a quiver rippled over his lithe form.

“I will go to my room, madame, if you please,” he said. Then, as an afterthought: “My name is Gaston Chavannes, of Philadelphia.”

IX

Advancing the story to a time when honest folk are abed.

Manse jerked a thumb in the direction of the vanished figure, and leered interrogatively into the weather-bitten face across from him. But Jehu was more inclined to drink than talk. He shoved the capacious mug he was using back to be refilled, and wiped the moisture from his sandy, straggling mustache. Mine host obligingly brimmed the bumper afresh, his whole form twisting with unsatisfied curiosity the while. He again essayed by signs to elicit some information. It certainly was bad luck that Dick Turber was hard of hearing. The second draught must have mellowed him, however, for, holding the nearly empty mug poised he said, in the piercing tones peculiar to some who cannot hear:

"Got abode at Lexin'ton, an' said he wanted to go to the Limpin' Dawg Inn."

Manse grinned, scuttled around the corner of the bar, and drew up at Dick's side with his mouth lifted to the other's ear and his hands trumpeted.

"He's a furriner, ain't he, Dicky?"

"Said his name were She-Vonn. A qu'er name fur a man, an' outlandish's hell," calmly opined Mr. Turber. "He must be furrin. He's too white." He threw his head back and guzzled the remaining drops of the precious liquid.

Manse danced to the other side of the stage driver, remembering suddenly that Dick was deafer in one ear than he was in the other, but

failing to recall which ear was which. Again he approached his mouth, shielded by his cupped hands, and shouted:

"Whut mought be his business, Dicky? Did he say?"

Then, forgetting in his excitement that his own auditory nerves were all right, he inclined his head attentively.

The liquor had begun to warm up Mr. Turber.

"He rode inside mos' o' the way, but he clum' up by me at Cedarton an' axed some questions."

Manse nodded encouragement, and maintained his expectant attitude.

"He axed a few questions, I say," repeated Deef Dick, reaching for his tobacco.

"Exactly," approved Manse, nodding his head vigorously. "A furriner by the name o' She-Vonn, an' he wanted to know——"

"'Bout the people hereaway, an' mainly an' perticerlily 'bout the gal what's stole out o' my coach."

"Interested in the gal, was he?" piped the little innkeeper. "Her sweetheart, Dicky; trust me to know that. She's from Philadelphia, too. Now the fur'll fly; you'll see!"

"He axed me ever'thing 'bout the gang whut hel' me up, an' got tur'bly excited. Wanted to know whut'd been done, an' if anybody had any idee who done it. I tol' 'im folks had plenty o' idees, but 's 'fraid to speak 'em."

"Then whut'd he do, Dicky? 'Member me an' you's been frien's fur many a year. Whut'd he say then, Dicky?"

Mr. Turber rolled a crafty eye toward the other end of the room. The fire had died down till only a few blue-green flames clung about the charred logs. Mr. Stout was asleep, breathing stertorously with his thick chin sunk in his stock, while Morde-

cai Fode, seated in a chair, was occupied in plaiting some leather thongs. Noey Mole was standing in front of a grandfather's clock, scrutinizing the dial intently. Slowly the stage driver turned his back upon these three, and putting his hand in his pocket, drew it forth a fist. This fist he quietly thrust under his friend's nose, and unclasped. A large gold piece lay in his palm.

"Whut! Whut!" Manse began to stutter, but Dick raised his other hand warningly.

"I tol' 'im *my* idee fur that!" he said, triumphantly, "an' the contrac' was he's not to say a word. There wasn't much more talk in 'im after that. He got pow'ful glum."

Mr. Higbee scratched his head, and pulled his ear, and fidgeted.

"Damn it, Dicky!" he blurted out; "I've got a idee too! Reck'n he'll buy mine? . . . A double eagle!" he added, under his breath.

"You want 'o go mighty slow, not git me in trouble," warned the wily Turber, beginning to button his coat. The change of horses had been made, and it was time to resume his journey. The fact was brought to mind by the appearance of the ostler, represented mainly by a shock of hair, who had thrust his head in the room and bawled:

"High an' low;
Time to go!"

which rhyme was of his own invention, and in which he took much pride. The seven-foot clock which stood to the left of the high mantle whirred, and began to strike nine. The innkeeper drew near for a final query, but just then Moll's clattering footsteps sounded within, immediately followed by her presence.

"The gentleman wants 'is luggage, Manse Hig-

bee!" she flared out, "an' who's goin' to take it to 'im? Am I to cut wood an' draw water as well as cook an' sweep an' men' an' make? Take them han' things fust, an' be keerful you don't drop 'em. Fine gentleman has fine things, an' it might be there's breakables in 'em. An' you be not man enough to handle the trunk yo'seff, call Joe-boy to he'p you! I tell you this house ain't seen the likes of him upstairs this many a day. Pretty as a gal he is, an' manners of a lady. With 'Thank you, ma'am, an' 'If you please, ma'm,' an' 'Don't go to no trouble, ma'm.' Step sharp, man; the gentleman's waitin'!"

Her shrill voice penetrated to the stupefied brain of Ephraim Stout, and as Manse seized a bag in either hand and began a rearward retreat, while Deef Dick sought his waiting horses, Red-coat slowly straightened up, blinked laboredly a time or two, and said:

"You should git a gal to ten' bar, Moll; a young gal, an' purty!"

"I serves in my own house, Mr. Stout, I thank ye!" retorted Mistress Higbee, with an upward toss of her chin.

The Henglishman got to his feet, tittering sillily.

"I dreamed there were a gal tendin' bar—a purty gal," he continued, his tongue working imperfectly. "An' when she brought my ale I kissed 'er (te-he!) an' she kissed me back (te-he!). So when I wakes up I says you should have a gal (te-he-he!)"

"It's home you're needin' right now, an' a bed to sleep on," answered Moll, hands on protruding hips and fire in her green eyes; "an' not a gal to kiss! Be off with you now! We're shettin' up."

Ephraim jammed his three-cornered hat further down upon his head and started for the door on unsteady legs. And as he went his face expressed

the thoughts in his mind, for his heavy lips drooled slaver, and twitched, and he shook his jowls and muttered: "A purty gal—a young gal—a gal you can hug an' kiss!" Then, with a loud smack from his eager lips, he lurched out.

"What's the matter with Eph? Never knew him to talk so much."

Noey Mole vaulted over the settle as he spoke, and peered eagerly into the tin measure which still sat there. It was empty.

"He's a wastrel an' a oaf!" sniffed Moll. "An' he comes any more fool chat aroun' me he'll git 'is years boxed!"


She stalked across the room to close the door which the object of her displeasure had of course left open, but even as her hand went out she stopped, then slowly began to step backward. The bear, which had been sitting quiescent, shifted uneasily and growled low.

A young man appeared in the doorway. His head almost touched the lintel, and his figure bulked large in the opening. A monstrous collie dog pushed forward to his side—to stop with bared fangs and the quick rising of a yellow ruff. Saul's hand fell to the stiffened neck.

"Be quiet, laddie!" he ordered. Then, advancing a few steps, he bowed, and said:

"My name is Saul Brentley, and may I lodge here to-night, mistress? I have been told your hostelry is the best for miles around—why, here's Mordecai Fode!" For that individual had arisen and come forward.

Mistress Higbee curtseyed and bobbed, and declared it would be a pleasure for her to receive the young gentleman. But in the meantime the skins-and-leather man had Saul by the hand, and was speaking in mildly excited tones for one of *his placid temperament*.



"We meet again, young sir. Not at Cadwalader Hull's, as I had supposed, but here. I looked in on Master Hull as I came by, and he said that you'd had a cup with him, and knew him on sight, at which he took much delight."

"He was very proud at being known," acquiesced Saul. "He seems a jolly fellow."

"Aye, a merry man. . . . But why not come with me this night? Remember your promise on the road this morning. I am journeying to Beechum's Woods at once."

"Be off, Mordy, an' let the gentleman be!" burst in Moll, who was ever keen for business which would add a little silver to her hoard. "Who would traipse a matter o' five mile this night, in comp'ny with a varmint of a bear to boot, when he might rest in a good feather bed with a sheet over 'im?"

Saul smiled from one to the other, and squeezing the bony hand he held, answered:

"Many thanks for your kind offer, dear sir, but I suspect the lady is right, insofar as the walk is concerned. I have already traveled many a mile last night and to-day, and I'm a little tired to-night."

"'Tis not so far," protested the philosopher. "I know a short cut which will bring us home much sooner."

"Out with ye, Mordy!" repeated Moll, gently pushing his shoulder. "The gentleman says he wants to rest, an' there's no rest on the road."

"I'll try and come soon, though," answered Brentley. "Maybe to-morrow. I don't think your bear and my dog would travel together peacefully to-night, and my legs are sore from walking."

"I would not urge you against your will," replied Mordecai Fode, drawing back in gentle dignity. "No doubt you are worn and need sleep."

I dwell in Beechum's Woods—don't forget that. Anybody can tell you where they are. I wish you a pleasant night."

He walked with silent steps to Paddyfoot, and Saul, with a single whistle, brought Dhu bounding to his side. The bear shuffled out into the night, but at the door his master turned, bowed low with his cap in his hand, then followed his strange pet.

"I met him this morning on the river road," explained Saul, "and he seemed to take a fancy to me."

"A harmless soul," commented Moll, "but a little daffy. No nateral human'd live with a beast for comp'ny. . . . An' your belongin's, sir?"


"Are on this stick," with a whimsical grimace. "I tramp—not because I must—but because I please."

"La! I can see quality with half a' eye!" said Moll, laughing deep in her throat, spreading her hands with a flaring gesture. "Many come here for bread an' bed. To some I say: 'Pay now, or pack yo'seff off!'; to the gentry I say: 'Tarry an' welcome, an' pay when you will.' Now would you have a bite, or a mug o' somethin', before you go to your room?"

"Neither, thank you. I have both supped and eaten, and wish for nothing but a place to lay my weary bones."

Little Manse came dashing in, and stooping, laid hands on the brass-bound trunk which sturdy Dick Turber had carried from the road so easily. But Manse could no more than lift one end from the floor, and this presently slipped from his grasp and fell with a resounding thump.

"Call Joe-boy to he'p you!" ordered his consort, sharply. Then, sweetly—"This way, young gentleman."



"Joe-boy's 'sleep, an' you can't wake 'im up after the stage leaves!" shrilled Manse.

"What is it?" interposed Saul, stopping. "Do you want the trunk moved somewhere?"

"Yes, but don't you stoop to it," answerd Moll. "Here, Noey Mole; an' you loaf 'roun' here you mus' make yo'seff o' use. Come, lend a han'."

The preacher wiggled his toes as he perched on the settle with outstretched legs, and grinned slily.

"I've a rupture, mistress, and dare lift nothing," he lied, cheerily.

"I'll be glad to help," Saul spoke again, casting a quick glance of recognition at the nondescript figure, and identifying it with the one he had seen that morning snoring in a chair at the Leaning Stump. "But first let's take care of my dog."

"Turn 'im outside, or there's the stable——"

But Brentley shook his head.

"If you don't mind, may he stay with me? I'll pay for him the same as myself. I shouldn't care for him to be out all night."

"An' to be sure he may!" assented Mistress Higbee. "Clean as a person he seems. The trunk, sir, belongs to another young man that Deef Dick fetched in to-night. From Philadelphia, he said, but 'is name I can't give you, 'cause it's furrin an' has a heathen soun'—the gentleman's waitin', Manse! Where's your eyes?"

For Saul had bent to hide the look of surprise which sprang to his face when he heard the stranger was from Philadelphia.

"Up with her, mine host!" he cried, genially, and a moment after they were following Moll, who bore a lighted candle, Manse groaning and staggering, and Saul conscious of a keen curiosity to look upon the man with the furrin name.

They entered a passage connecting evidently with the culinary department, for the odor of kitchen was heavy in the air, and then began the ascent of a dim, broad stairway with a heavy balustrade. As they reached the upper hall Moll stopped in front of a door partly ajar, and rapped. There came a prompt response, and the three entered, followed by the dog. Barely across the threshold Manse gave down and abruptly eased his end of the burden to the floor. Then he retreated, rubbing his numbed fingers and muttering. Moll volubly inquired after the comfort of her guest while Brentley dragged the trunk to a spot near the bed, on the edge of which sat a striking looking man in his shirt sleeves. Saul greeted him with an inclination of the head, and during the few questions and answers which now passed, observed him closely.

The stranger was slender and elegant in appearance. His white shirt seemed to be of silk, and his trousers of some rich cloth. He had removed his hat, and his face showed thin, with clear-cut, regular features. Mobile, too, they were, and subtly responsive, as evidenced by the varying expressions which came with the landlady's solicitude for his comfort. Brentley's nostrils detected the presence of perfume, and he was instantly aware of a certain displeasure. It suggested effeminacy to his mind, a bit out of place when connected with a man. The figure on the bed waved his arm with a smile—a smile so captivating that Saul wondered.

"There is nothing I need, madame, I assure you." Then, rising, he inclined his body gracefully toward Saul. "I thank you, sir, for assisting with my luggage. Had I known there was any difficulty in getting it to me, I would have come myself."

His voice was sweet and mellow, and his glance winning.

Before Saul could reply, Dhu, standing at his knee, walked sedately forward and lifted his muzzle to the speaker, inviting attention. The man patted the shining white head, and Dhu waved his plummy tail.

"It was little to do, and I beg you not to mention it," said Brentley. He went to the door, whither Moll had preceded him, then turned.

"You are the first stranger my dog ever made overtures to," he said.

"Let us hope his sagacity is not at fault," replied the other, and smiled again.

The room into which our hero and his dog were ushered adjoined the one he had just left, and appeared to be at the southwestern corner of the building. The floor was bare, the walls plastered, and the furniture consisted of two shuck-bottomed chairs, an old chest, and a massive four-post bed. Moll placed her candle upon the chest, which held a basin and a pitcher of water.

"You'll find your bed sweet an' clean, sir," she said, "an' I hope you'll sleep well."

"No fear of that, good lady," replied Saul, dumping his bundles on the floor. "I could sleep standing up, with something to lean against."

As Moll withdrew Brentley walked to the window and raised the sash, placing under it a stick which he found convenient. The room felt stuffy. He paused for a moment to look out. Though the moon was up, nothing could be seen because of the enveloping shade except the large bole of a tree rising not many feet away, and a limb springing from its trunk which he could have reached had he wished. As he turned he heard a dry snap, as of a piece of wood breaking under a foot. But this was too common and natural

a sound to arouse concern, and presently he was getting out of his clothes, talking to Dhu as he undressed.

"Be careful not to walk in your sleep, my Scotchman, and tumble out of that window. But I've a notion each of us will lie like logs. It's been a busy day, lad; a full day, and night finds your master on the borderland of love, if one can put faith in feeling. Did you ever see such living perfection, Roddy? Fickle, you say? Ah, my boy; not fickle, but mistaken. I thought I loved Jinsy; I was entirely honest. Promise? Gad! I'd forgotten that! And she's a girl who'd hold a fellow to his pledge." He stopped for a moment and frowned before him. "Lie down, Dhu, and go to sleep," he added, with a sigh. Then, murmuring "Dorothy, Dorothy," over and over like one suddenly bereft of reason, he blew out his candle and went to bed.

He did not remain awake long, and accompanying the train of roseate visions which crowded one upon the other through his brain was the steady, ceaseless sound of soft footsteps in the next room. Plainly his neighbor's mind was far more disturbed than his own. Very soon, the memory of Dorothy's smile bringing one to his own lips, Saul slept.

X

Describing a stealthy attack in the night hours, and showing how the gentleman from Philadelphia and our hero joined hands in a certain quest.

After leaving the tap-room of the Limping Dog, Mordecai Fode and Paddyfoot took the highroad for New Market. The stage had already rattled away on its journey toward Nashville, and the night was very calm and without noise. Side by side the incongruous pair plodded through the dust, the man now and again addressing some remark to the great, shaggy beast. They had proceeded perhaps a mile, and were passing a thick copse which bordered the road, when the bear stopped abruptly, and throwing up his muzzle, sniffed. Mordecai buried one hand in the thick, rough fur of the animal's neck, and bent to listen. At first he heard nothing but the almost inaudible susurrations of the leaves, but directly another sound reached his ears, so faint as to be barely perceptible. At once he moved toward the copse, and presently man and beast had merged with the shadows.


The long grasses which their passage set to waving had not ceased to vibrate before two horsemen went by. A cloud was before the moon, but Mordecai, crouching twelve feet away, knew the near rider to be Mack Leek. The horses' hoofs were muffled, and thudded dully on the road. They passed at a slow canter, without a word.

"The other was Jew's-harp George, the ferryman, I'll warrant," mused Mordecai, as the twain

came forth to resume their journey. "Some deviltry's afoot. No honest man'd try to make his horse walk without noise. You smelt 'em, Paddy-foot, didn't you? Good bear!"

Whereupon he pulled one of the stub ears gently, and started forward again.

From the deep slumber which falls upon tired, healthy youth, Saul awoke in the night. This was almost unknown to him, and the fact that he occupied a strange bed could not account for it. He lay on his side, breathing gently, and, mildly wondering how his eyes should open of themselves in this peculiar way, closed them again. But now his ears gave warning. His position was facing the window, and it was from this point the sound came—a barely audible sliding and slithering, as of something or some one passing over the sill with extreme care. In a moment now his brain shook off the sleep-mists, and became keenly alert. He remembered the sound below after he had raised the window. Some one was seeking his life, and it did not require a second thought to declare his name. Mack Leek had openly vowed vengeance that morning by the river bank, and he or an emissary was even now bent upon its execution. Clouds must have overspread the sky, for, strive as he might, Saul could gather no outline of that which was approaching. The upper square of the window was dimly discernible, but the lower part was solid blackness. His revolver was under his head. Should he draw and begin to fire, or wait a few moments longer? But a quick second-reflection convinced him that he would gain nothing by delay, and probably incur great danger instead. The assassin would likely rush him, once within the room, and that moment Saul heard a sound like a heel scraping on wood.



As he noiselessly slipped his hand beneath his pillow he became conscious of a second presence,—an object which moved stealthily along his bedside, brushing it as it went. Brentley instantly realized the significance of this. Roderick Dhu was keeping guard over his sleeping master. He had sensed or heard the intruder, and with padded feet which made no sound was slinking forward to the attack. Should he trust to the dog, or use the weapon he had now drawn? Before Saul could weigh the question thus suddenly presenting itself, Dhu leaped with a snarling growl of wrath. There came a report and a flash of flame from the window, and a bullet whined by Brentley's ear as he flung himself from the bed. Came also a curse and a shout of pain from the darkness, the crashing of glass and the rattle of a stick upon the floor. Above the shrill barking of the collie was heard the snort of a frightened horse, then voices called within the house, and there were hurrying footsteps.

As Saul reached blindly for a match, his door was flung open, and the young stranger whose luggage he had helped to carry rushed in. He bore a lighted candle in one hand and a long dagger in the other. Together the men dashed to the black opening in the wall where the window had been, for both sashes were gone now. Dhu, feet on the sill and ruff aflame, was glaring down into the inn yard and voicing his rage with each breath. The foreigner thrust his candle out into the night at arm's length, but a breeze caught and fluttered the flame, making its small light more ineffectual still. Peer as they would, they could see nothing. An ironical laugh floated in from the road, followed by the galloping of hoofs.

At this point mine host appeared in great haste, clad in his undergarments and a red flannel night-

cap. In his hands he bore a blunderbuss, which he flourished with marked lack of caution. Close on his heels panted Moll, likewise garbed in a sleeping garment, and armed in turn with an ancient horse pistol. Behind her huddled the black servants, timorous and silent. Manse was inclined to be the hero of the hour.

"Whut is it an' whur is he?" he cried, poking about the room with his absurd gun, and even leaning to peep under the bed.

"D'ye 'low he's stayed to take a night with us, Manse Higbee?" retorted Moll, in fine scorn, gesticulating with her pistol in such a way that her spouse retreated precipitately from her. Then, turning with an abbreviated curtsy, she addressed the two men who stood with amused faces, watching the scene. "It's the fust time, young sirs, that cutthroats 'v ever come to my house, though maybe 'twas money they was after, an' not blood. Did you see the vilyun's face, Master Brentley?"

"No, but there's no use to worry," replied Saul, coming forward with a smile. "I don't think he will come back, whoever he is. My dog met him at the window, and forced him through it. The fall didn't hurt him, because he laughed as he rode away."

"It's good o' you to take it so light, Master Brentley, but if they come once they might come ag'in when there's no men folks about to skeer 'em away. I'm fair worrit an' upset, that I am!"

"Don't feel anxious about it," Saul reassured her, and he patted her shoulder soothingly. "They chose my room because they were after me. Go back to bed now, and enjoy your sleep, for I know you get up early."

"When the fust rooster crows, I'm up!" piped in little Manse, deftly adjusting his nightcap, "an' the ol' woman stirs soon after."

"There's no more rest for me this night," answered Moll, "but I thank you for your kindness. It'll be a lastin' shame to me that cutthroats come upon you beneath *my* roof."

"Aye, beneath our roof!" chimed in Manse, turning to go. "If the dev'ls 'd only stayed till I got here!" he added, pausing and shaking his blunderbuss at the window.

"Out! And give the gentlemen some peace!" ordered Moll, and her warlike consort vanished at once. "Sleep if you can, good sirs," she continued; "you can have a good warm breakfas' when you want it."

The foreigner bowed gravely. Saul gave a smiling "All right, Mrs. Higbee; don't bother about us!" and the landlady withdrew, driving the scared servants before her. When the clattering on the stair had ceased, our hero turned and held out his hand.

"My name is Saul Brentley, and I want to thank you for coming to my aid."

With a lithe movement his companion placed the lighted candle he held upon the chest, then took in a firm, snug grip the offered hand.

"My name is Gaston Chavannes," he said, "and my only regret is that I had to tarry long enough to make a light."

There was such a genuine ring to this response that Saul felt his heart warming toward this dandyish looking fellow who smelled of perfume. Already he had proven he was not a coward. Would he not make a valuable ally in the adventure which lay ahead?

"Do you tarry hereabout for a time?" he asked, following an impulse, "or are you simply breaking a journey, overnight?"

The Frenchman regarded his questioner keenly

for a moment before he replied, in a low, troubled tone.

"I am here on urgent business of the gravest importance, and stay until it is finished."

"I, too, have a mission here," returned Saul, "and I trust we may become friends."

"You honor me."

Chavannes gave a courtly bow.

"I am going to confide in you, if you will permit me," went on Brentley, "and I will speak while the candle burns, with your permission, as I don't think either of us will sleep again to-night."

"By all means let us talk. Your confidence shall be respected."

Saul offered his guest a chair, but Chavannes waved it politely aside, and leaping agilely upon the bed, sat there cross-legged, toying with the long, slender dagger which he still held.

"It's a queer tale," began Brentley, by way of introduction, taking a chair and thrusting his legs out in front their full length.

Then once again he told of his night trip down the river, and of what befell him as he drifted, asleep, beneath the cliffs. The delicate white hands of his listener ceased their manipulations of the dagger at this point, and Saul noticed, in wonder, that his face grew stony all at once, and seemed to turn pallid in the candlelight. But part of this may have been imagination on his part, so the narrator forbore to break his story, but proceeded until he came to that portion of it wherein he revealed to Dorothy Pembroke the missive he had taken from the bottle. Then, as under the commanding hand of a mesmerist, Gaston Chavannes slid from the bed, his eyes wide and staring, and the veins showing on his white temples.

"Have you the letter?" he asked, in a strained whisper.

"I think so," answered Saul, beginning to fear for the sanity of his new-found friend. "Toss me that waistcoat, please."

Chavannes seized the garment indicated where it lay on the foot of the bed, and thrust it almost fiercely into Brentley's hands.

"Quick!" he breathed.

And presently the soiled, crumpled sheet was between his clutching fingers. Thrusting it close to the light, he read the dim lines hurriedly, then dropped the paper and leaned against the chest, breathing hard.

Saul sat in polite silence, awaiting an explanation.

Presently Chavannes spoke.

"I love Margot LaTour," he said, simply. "I have come from Philadelphia to find her."

Brentley was on his feet, and his hands went out to grasp the shoulders of his new acquaintance.

"And this morning I gave my solemn promise to Dorothy Pembroke to rescue this girl! It would appear we are traveling the same road, friend Gaston."

The mobile face of the young Frenchman lighted joyfully.

"But how is it that you, a stranger——" he began, when the expression in Saul's eyes stopped him.

"You wonder why it is that I should undertake such a dangerous and difficult task for one whom I scarcely know? A natural feeling, indeed—but have you ever seen Mistress Dorothy?"

"Never."

"Then you can only partly understand." Saul's lips twisted in a peculiar smile. "I, too, am in love, you see."

"Oho! What good fortune!" And Chavannes, laughing, embraced Saul's shoulder with one arm.

" 'Tis said in Normandy that a pair of lovers would not make one good fool, but we will prove the saying false. Oh, *mon ami*! You make me happy! The gods are kind, and Fate is generous! To think we should reach here the same day, to espouse the same cause, and meet thus on the eve of battle, as it were, to join forces. My heart has been heavy, but now it beats light—light! I could almost sing—Saul, you say? . . . Come"—snuffing the candle dextrously with finger and thumb and throwing the char away—"we must talk more, and be ready when the day dawns."

Taking Brentley by the arm he drew him to the bed, and together they sat upon its edge. Chavannes produced cigarettes, which Saul declined upon the ground that he never smoked before breakfast, but presently the Frenchman's head was wreathed in folds of scented vapor.

"You are on your native heath, and you must lead," he said. "The first question is: shall we pay or shall we fight?"

"Pay?"

"The ransom. The word which came to her uncle, old Anatole LaTour, the tailor, said that ten thousand dollars was demanded."

"Dorothy told me that this uncle was poor, and that her own father could not command the ready money. There is nothing to do but go and get your Margot, by stealth or by strength."

As Saul turned his head, he saw a row of very white teeth, and eyes smiling at him between narrowed lids.

"Was the trunk, then, so light?" queried Gaston Chavannes.

"What! . . . Why, then, did not Dorothy —,"

"She knew of me only as a poor scrivener to a notary. The good fortune came after sweet

Margot had been two days on her journey hither. A rich legacy from overseas—from a doting relative, reached me. The trunk is lined with gold, friend Saul. Shall we pay, or shall we fight?"

And this debonair son of Normandy brought his ankle to his knee, lifted his chin, and waved his cigarette airily.

"We'll fight!" replied Brentley, his hands clenching and a scowl leaping to his forehead. "We'd be fine gentlemen to sit back and smoke our pipes and hand over a fortune to the damned brigand! Surely you can find better use for your gold than to dump it into this thief's pocket." Then, smiling, " 'Twill buy frocks and pretty things for the lady, after the clergy has spoken."

"I would give it all to save her unharmed," was the quick reply, in a devout tone.

"And more too, did you have it, and were it necessary," supplemented Brentley, warmly. "But that must be our last move. Actual fighting is next to the last. Our cue is strategy, and quick work. Mack Leek knows I am on the ground, and he suspects I have his secret. That accounts for this disturbance here to-night. He doesn't know you are here, but he will know it before another day is gone. He won't dare harm the girl, so you can set your mind at rest on that point. But, once he is sure that we are seeking her, he may remove her to another hiding place. I learn that he grows bolder every day, and the good people hereabout are beginning to tire of his deviltry. So we can depend upon the sympathy and assistance of the community."

"What do you suggest?"

"A reliable guide, and as direct a line as possible to the river cliffs."

"Who goes beside us and the guide?"

"A certain Scot named Rhoderick Dhu."

In answer to the perplexed look on Chavannes' face, he pointed to the recumbent form of the big collie.

"Oh! It is well to have the brave dog. But would not more men be well?"

"We do not need them. They would be cumbersome and in the way. I believe the retreat will be unguarded, if we can come to it. Our task will be to find it."

"You do not even know whether it is approached from the river or from the land?"

"It can't be approached from the river. Read again what Margot says."

Saul took the piece of paper from Gaston's hand, and drew the candle to that end of the chest by which they sat.

"Here is what she writes: 'My prison seems impossible of access. It is thirty feet down a sheer stone wall. I cannot escape unaided, for it is sixty or seventy feet to the river.' There you have it. It is either go down the cliff from above by means of a rope, or else find some passage inland leading to the cave. But the devil of it will be locating her. I am told there are miles of those cliffs, with a more or less uniform appearance."

"It may take days," said Chavannes, heavily, and sighed.

"It is certain to take stout hearts and patience, but let us hope luck will be with us."

"The candle's going; it gutters in the socket."

"And yonder is the day," returned Saul, rising and pointing to a dim gray square which marked the window opening. "Come, dress yourself, and we will eat. We must move quickly."

XI

Presenting a fair damsel in durance vile; confiding to the reader the history of one Sis Tomperby, a hag, the which touches our story vitally, and ending with a voice calling in the night.

The rising moon shone full upon a gray wall of stone which lifted a hundred feet or more from the rushing river. On both sides the stream this peculiar formation existed, but the northern cliff was the one which caught the moonlight. For a great distance on either side the river was flanked thus, and between the high, sombre barriers it hurried on unendingly. The walls were creased with narrow, uneven ledges, whereon during the ages soil had accumulated, probably a mingling of stone-dust, storm-tossed leaves, and earth borne by the wind. None of this soil was of sufficient depth to give nourishment for a tree, but the scarps were flecked and patched with abortive vegetable growths; stunted saplings and undersized bushes, clinging tenaciously to the beds wherein they were born and on which in time they were destined to die. Moss, too, had drawn its shadowy mantle across the monstrous slabs of stone, and sickly grasses waved in the wind like phantom fingers plucking vaguely at the air. Here and there the stone was riven, as though by some cataclysm of nature in uncounted years. Fissures appeared. Most of these were horizontal, as though caused by the giving way of certain strata, but now and then a vertical crevice showed. And it was at one of these crevices, high up on the

cliff where the river made a gentle curve, that the pale face of a girl appeared, gazing out with troubled eyes upon the stupendous grandeur spread everywhere around.

For twice her height the rent arose, its sides uneven, the opening never large enough to admit the passage of her body. And this perhaps was well, for there had been times during the irksome days and nights she had spent as a prisoner here that Margot LaTour had felt she would have cast herself down into the swirling water. At first she had felt sure she could slip through the opening, but later discovered she was wrong. She was slight of form, but rounded prettily, and her large dark eyes were haunting in their wistful appeal. Now shadows showed beneath them, and her hands, as she clutched the sides of the opening, were ghostly white, and thin. Silently she stood, listening to the purling and gurgling of the river against the eternal base of her cruel fortress, and watching the moon creep up above the other cliff. She had come to wait for the moon, because it seemed so calm and pure, and in some way its presence brought a kind of relief. The first nights of her captivity had been horribly lonely, but when, later, a pale radiance stole through the prison window, she accepted it as a sort of companionship and thereafter watched for its coming. In the beginning, too, the old woman who was her jailer had appeared morose and disinclined to talk, though always kind. In the past few days the distressed girl had succeeded in winning her friendship, and this had made the confinement and dread less hard to bear.

Margot gazed at the moon, and thought of the message she had cast out two nights before. Where was it now, she wondered. Miles and miles away, drifting along to some larger river? or had

friendly hands found it? She had read of such expedients before, and often they had succeeded. But in this lonely country who could there be to pick up a floating bottle, should one by chance see it? She knew too well that the probability of its being found was remote indeed, and as the full significance of what this meant smote in upon her consciousness, her head dropped, and a sob struggled from her throat.

A shadow appeared behind her, and a yellow claw-like hand crept to her shoulder.

"La, La, now! It hasn't cried for two full days!" crooned the crone, in a cracked voice of varying register. "'Tis not good for maids to stare at the moon. It breeds thoughts in 'em." She patted the girl's heaving shoulders. "I was a bonny lass myself once, mind you, though folk now call me Sis Tomperby, the hag o' Beechum's Woods. La! La! I moon-gazed, too, an' I was fair as you, though nobody with an eye in their head would believe it today. Come, little dearie"—with a sudden tender inflection strangely at variance with the all but repulsive personality which voiced it—"let's hang up the curtain an' light the candle. Then if you'll lay down to sleep like a good child, I might tell you a story—a story o' maids and moons and men. . . . Now listen at me! Old enough to die, an' chatterin' sich silly stuff in your years."

So, talking thus, the old woman gently drew the girl back from the fissure, loosed with a stick a heavy, dark blanket suspended in some manner at the top of the opening, and plunged them both in gloom. Another moment a sulphur match was fizzing and spluttering, and Sis Tomperby was bending to light a half-burnt candle which sat on an outcropping knob of limestone. Very much like a witch she seemed as she leaned forward, mechan-

ically shielding the tiny blaze where there was no wind, for the shadows were great and the light was small. She had been a large woman in her day, and even at this time the stoop of age and toil and the queer array of shapeless garments which she wore could not disguise the fact. It would be impossible to give a correct description of her dress. A loose, formless black gown, a little shoulder cape, and something on her head which was neither hat, cap nor bonnet comprised her attire. A first glance at her face would inevitably produce a feeling of repugnance, for before one had time to analyze her features the long yellow fang which fell down upon her lower lip would instantly repel. But once past this abnormality, the face of Sis Tomperby was not so bad. It is true it was wrinkled, and weather-tanned, and not too clean, but her nose must have come from an Hellenic source, and her eyes were kind.

As the candle wick finally caught, smouldered an instant, then grew to a sphere of flame, the interior of the place was revealed. It was surprisingly roomy. Roughly measured, it was about sixteen feet in length, by ten broad. The cave narrowed abruptly near the cliff side. There were boxes and bags disposed about, and two couches made of twigs and moss, over which blankets had been thrown. There was no visible means of ingress to the chamber, but of course it existed, or Margot and the old hag could not have been there.

Sinking listlessly upon her couch, Margot clasped one drawn-up knee with her laced fingers, and looked up at her companion beseechingly.

"I ees so tired and lonely, madame," she said, piteously. "W'en are zey goin' let me depart to my frien's?"

"There, there," soothed Sis Tomperby, waving one hand deprecatingly, then turned to go back to the curtain, which she examined closely to see that no light could escape around its edge. Then, coming back, she drew a low box toward the girl and sat down.

"How long? How long?" pleaded Margot, her eyes brightening with moisture. "Won't you show me ze way out, madame? Oh, I would bless you!"

And with southern fervor she threw herself forward and grasped the crone's hand, gazing up with tragic, anguished face.

Sis Tomperby gently smoothed the rumpled hair of her charge and smiled in sympathy, murmured something which never shaped to words, and presently spoke.

"I can't do that, dearie. It'd be all my life's wuth, an' though I be nigh onto seventy an' have suffered cruel hard endurin' my days, yet I want 'o live. Now ain't that funny? It's just born in a person. They're skeer'd o' goin'. Some are skeer'd o' hell, an' some just o' the dark. I don't know. But I want 'o live, dearie, same as you; an' you wouldn't have me kilt, would you?"

Margot's dark head drooped.

"No, no. You bene good to me. I could not have live one day wizout you. . . . But ze men who bring me here—Oh, madame!"

She shuddered, and drew herself closer to the huddled form as if for protection.

"Don't worry your little kitten soul about that, 'r them. Bless your heart! They ain't goin' to do you no hurt, not even the big one, an' he's the wust o' the bunch. It's money they're wantin', an' they took a chanet at you 'cause they knew you's comin' to visit at Cap'n Pembroke's, an'

s'posed your folks's rich. When the money comes we'll find a way out o' here—don't you fret."

Margot rocked her head in despair, and her voice came up muffled from the kindly lap where she had hid her face.

"But I haf no money. I am poor—poor as ze church mouse. I haf no fam'ly but Uncle Anatole, an' he scrape an' save to sen' me on zis trip. Ze money never, never come. Oh, I am los', los'!"

The sound of bitter, hopeless sobbing followed.

After a while the cracked voice of Sis Tomperby spoke.

"When I's young, gals didn't stare at the moon just because it's big and round. Ain't you got no friends, little missy? Men friends, I mean—one man friend, I might mean, who'd git the money if he didn't have it? Now, now, tell the truth! A gal with eyes like yours, an' hips, an' —,"

With a short, sharp scream Margot sat up and thrust her hand over the babbling mouth. Old tongues sometimes speak truths which young ears do not like to hear.

"Hush! Hush!" she cried, her cheeks tinged and anger in her eyes; brief anger, which passed before it could be seen by the laughing old woman. "You mus' not talk 'bout me, my—myseff zat way when you name ze gen'leman, too. It ess not—proper! It ees vulgar—*oui!*"

"La, la, you young ones!" cackled Sis Tomperby, rocking to and fro, hiding her gums with three fingers laid horizontally across her withered lips. "But so was I fifty year ago. It's natur', an' you can't go ag'in it." Then, soberly enough; "I didn't 'tend to make you mad, dearie, but I's thinkin' the likes o' you must have a sweetheart, an' that he'd come postin' when he got the news."

The girl, quiet now and gazing at the wall with

introspective vision, put out a forgiving hand without turning her head.

"Ther' ees one," she said, speaking softly, and as though to herself. "He ees noble, an' brave, an' loyal, an' he will come—oh, he will surely come! But, alas! he too is poor. Maybe he mus' borrow for ze lon' journey. . . . I see no hope, madame, unless you he'p."

She turned a pallid, stony face toward her aged jailer.

"I can't he'p, dearie; I must keep you safe. But you're not nigh as bad off as you might be. Lay down, now, an' while you git ready for sleep I'll tell you a story, an' then I know you'll feel better."

Margot smiled wanly.

"You sink me li'l' chil' to be made happy by fairy story?"

The old woman, busy at the young girl's couch, sighed.

"It's no made-up yarn, but a true tale, dearie. It's laid heavy an' dark in my heart a long time."

"Oh! ees it 'bout you?" exclaimed Margot, rising and taking down her hair, and loosening her clothing preparatory to lying down.

"Yes, it's about me."

"If it ees sad an' make you unhappy, maybe you better not tell it."

Drawing her abundant black tresses over her right shoulder, the girl began to braid them.

"I'm tellin' it to he'p you, an' I've carried a' open knife in my heart too long to feel any new hurt. . . . There now; lay down an' curl up like a good child."

And while Margot obediently complied and clasped her hands beneath her head, Sis Tomperby sank upon the box again, and let her fingers

stray vaguely over her mouth after the manner of toothless old women.

"It ees close in here to-night, madame, an' smells of damp earth," said the girl, after a few moments' silence. "Will you not put ze curtain up, so ze fresh air may come in from ze river? Zen I sleep ze quicker, for I hear ze music of ze water below. It ees like a lullaby. Put out ze candle if you fear ze light will be seen. You can talk in ze dark, an' I can listen."

The crone arose in silence and blew out the small flame, then as she laboriously lifted and secured the blanket which hung before the fissure, mounting a small ladder for the purpose, a flood of brilliant moonlight poured through the jagged opening, softly illuminating the cavern and falling over the recumbent figure on the couch.

"Oh! sank you, madame!" burst from the girl's lips in grateful accents. "How beautiful! An' how sweet an' fresh ze air smells! Come, now, an' tell me ze story. I sink I go to sleep soon."

"That moon, an' you, take me back fifty years an' more," replied Sis Tomperby, returning to her former seat. "I told you I's a pretty lass in them days, an' I was, though always a bit largish for a maid. The run o' men like their women middle size, or under, but I had big bones an' growed tall. I's upstandin' an' high-headed, though, an' the young bucks begun to look at me as soon's my dresses was to my shoe-tops. My pa was a smith, an' day after day I'd hang aroun' his forge watchin' him at his work. An' there one day I met a lad I learnt to love. It's the sweetest time in a woman's life, dearie, an' so it was to me while it lasted. I thought he loved me, too, for he spoke fair an' made lots o' brave promises 'bout what he's do when we's married. Pa never took to 'im, though, an' tol' me time an'

ag'in I oughtn't to go with 'im. But I did. I'd slip out at night to meet 'im, an' we'd walk in the moonlight an' say sweet, foolish things. Then one night I listened when I shouldn't, an'—an' give in to 'im, believin' his promise like silly women 've done before. The nex' day he lef' the country, an' never come back."

Sis Tomperby's mumbling monotone stopped, while Margot lay with closed eyes and hands now clasped on her breast. Wonderfully sweet and pure she seemed in the strip of moonlight. The old crone sighed.

"Never come back," she repeated. "Pa s'picioned what's the matter, but I denied it till I couldn't no longer, an' then he drove me out. He's a hard man, an' had no patience with a woman's weakness. I tried to fin' the man who'd treated me wrong, an' went up an' down the country lookin' for 'im, but he mus' have gone far away, for I never heerd of 'im ag'in. Some poor but kin' folks took me in, an' I worked for my keep. Then later the baby girl 's lots o' comfort, even if she didn't have no name. She growed up buxom an' bonny, with dimples an' curlin' hair, an' a trick with her eyes that'd come from her pa. But her good looks was a curse instead of a blessing. She had turned nineteen, when a rich stranger come along one day, drivin' a couch-and-four. He stopped to ask the way, an' seen her. He pretended business at the neighborin' town, but ever' day he'd manage to see my lam'. An' do what I could to stop it, she went the way of her ma. An' to make it harder, there was a' hones' young fellow crazy in love with 'er, an' beggin' 'er to marry 'im. He had a leather shop all 'is own an' was makin' a good livin'. Smart he was, too, an' full of Holy Writ, an' he'd preach here an' there as people asked 'im. He took to hard drink when

he found out what'd happened, an' soon struck out for other parts.

"Kitty waited for a year or more, believin' her lover'd come back for her, like he said he would. Then, like her ma ag'in, she took her girl chil' one night an' slipped away, takin' the Lexin'ton stage. We never heerd of 'er ag'in, nor the baby. Then people say that I grieved so hard that I got off in my min', an' roamd aroun' the country like some wil' thing. I can't remember that time much, an' maybe they're right, but it don't matter. For a score o' years I've been outcast, beggin' or stealin' or workin' at times. Ten years ago I foun' a' ol' empty cabin on the edge o' Beechum's Woods, an' that has been my home ever since. An' now, dearie, if you b'lieve in God, thank 'im that you're so well off, an' go to sleep."

Closing her story with this abrupt admonition, Sis Tomperby got to her feet and stood for a moment with her hand on her side, where an accustomed rheumatic pain hed seized her.

Margot sat up on her couch, her big eyes filled with pity and tenderness.

"Oh, madame! How you haf suffer! My heart it ache for you. Never will I complain to you more. I have been ungrateful to ze good God for his care of me. Now I pray his forgiveness an' go to sleep. You have show me how wicked I bene, an' I sank you."

Sis Tomperby made no reply, and in the stillness of the rocky chamber, from far away, a sound was now heard which shaped itself to the name of Margot.

With a quick exclamation of joy and surprise, the girl leaped up and pressed her fingers to her temples dazedly. Then a second time the night air brought her name to their ears, but whether from above or below it was impossible to tell.

"Zey're huntin' me! Zey're comin'!" gasped

Margot, excitedly, seizing the old woman's arm in supplication. "Oh! sank God! I soon be free!"

Sis Tomperby turned with sudden sternness, and spoke rapidly.

"They'll never find us! Even by daylight the way is hard. Now listen close to me, missy. Promise that you won't holler back; that you'll keep still, or else I'll have to tie your mouth shet an' hold you till they're gone!"

Margot fell to her knees in entreaty.

"Mercy! Oh, have mercy! Zey my frien's! . . . Hark!"—as once more, plainer and nearer, her name was called. "'Tis he, Gaston! He love me, an' he haf come! I know his voice. Mercy, madame! In ze name of ze daughter you love' an' los', let me cry to him I am here! Mary Mother will reward you!"

But her pleading fell on deaf ears. Even as her tumultuous words rushed from her lips, the crone picked up a shawl and began to fold it in grim preparation.

"Quick, now!" she said. "They're gittin' closer. Promise; or this goes over your mouth!"

Margot arose, and stared in dumb misery at the transformed old woman. The enormity of this crime against her happiness and freedom tied her tongue.

"Promise!" repeated the relentless voice.

Realizing that she had no other course, the girl bowed her head.

"I will keep quiet, madame," she said, calmly and with dignity.

And so they stood mute while the calling continued, ever drawing nearer, until presently the voice seemed just over their heads. Then it was that Margot, overcome, flung herself on the couch and shook with silent weeping, listening to the hail of the seeker above, which kept growing fainter until it could no longer be heard.

XII

Relating how Little Sam Pottle arrived upon the scene at a most opportune moment, and transcribing the revelation of Uncle Jacky Bibb.

The appetizing odor of fried ham pervaded the lower hall when Saul and Gaston came downstairs, from which they judged that breakfast was well under way. Although the sun was not yet up the light had greatly increased, and when they entered the tap-room they saw that it was occupied by little Manse alone. He was standing at the bar, busy mixing rum and water in careful proportions.

"Hey, young men! Up betimes, eh?" he greeted them genially. "What shall it be to start the day right, an' tone up your bellies for breakfas'? Nothin' better than two parts rum an' one part water."

"A little stout—straight, if you please."

Brentley spoke first, as he and his friend came forward in response to the invitation.

"Aye, a man's drink is stout," averred mine host, and began to burrow among some casks in search of the desired liquor. "When I was your age I took it straight, too, but time brings changes, as the sayin' is."

Producing a small demijohn, he wiped the dust from its neck with the sleeve of his coat, ignoring a cloth on a nearby nail which was evidently used for this and kindred purposes.

"There, sir; fit for a king, an' we had one," he continued, removing the cork and extending a

glass of generous capacity. "Make it a good one, young sir. When I's your age I'd take it full, but my innards ain't as hefty as they once was. . . . Now, Mr. She-Vong?"

He spread his palms on the polished surface of the bar, bent his elbows outward, and regarded his other guest with an expression intended for one of polite attention, but which in reality was only a ludicrous grimace.

"I believe I prefer a light wine," answered Gaston.

"Wine? . . . To be certainty. I'll put the old woman ag'in the world when it comes to mak-in' wine. We grows our own grapes an' gether the blackberries only when they're ripe enough. Now which would——"


"Grape, if you please, and not too sour," broke in Gaston, interrupting Manse's garrulous flow of small talk, which had doubtless been increased by his morning potations.

"And when you have done that," spoke up Brentley, "fetch me some writing materials, if you will be so good."

For the memory of his promise to the devoted spinster aunt had suddenly asserted itself, and it dawned upon him that if the letter were not dispatched that morning, it might be a number of days before he would find an opportunity to write again. A like promise which he had made to Jinsy was cast from off his mind.

Little Manse, with great alacrity, placed the desired beverage before Chavannes, then turned with the lobe of his right ear held tightly between finger and thumb.

"Writin' things?" he repeated, perplexedly. "They must be about, but havin' no book learnin'—wait till I see the ol' woman!"



And out he scuttled like a scared rat in the direction of the kitchen.

The two friends could hear his shrill voice stating his wants, and this was instantly followed by the clip-clap of heavy shoes on the bare floor. In a few moments Moll came in with paper, ink-horn and quill. Her round red face smiled a welcome as she bustled to a table near and put the materials upon it.

"I wasn't lookin' for you gentlemen till half the mornin' had passed," she said, wiping the table top with a corner of her apron. "Quality natch'ly gits up late, an' your rest was broke so outrageously."

"You've no idea who our visitors were?" queried Saul, pleasantly, dropping into a chair and drawing the paper to him.

"La, sir! It's got so lately folks dassn't tell their own names above a whisper. It might be this an' it might be t'other, but folks 's 've got their livin' to make can't afford to talk."

She folded her bare, fat arms and looked with troubled face from one to the other.

Brentley laughed.

"Oh, well! Maybe things will get better soon. Shall I have time to write a short note before breakfast?"

"Your breakfast will be when you want it, sir."

"Thanks. Say in about fifteen minutes. . . . Friend Gaston"—as the portly form of the obliging landlady waddled from view—"did you think to lock your door?"

"The key is in my pocket, friend Saul"—Chavannes was still sipping his wine with evident relish—"and it lies on my groin as heavy as a marlinspike."

Saul had begun his letter, and the scratching

of the imperfect quill sounded loudly in the quiet room.

"They seem good people here, and honest," he said, presently, "but I think we'd better risk the gold's safety without telling them of it and asking them to guard it. They seem to have the utmost respect for an honest penny, and when one begins to think too much of an honest penny, they are sometimes inclined to look with favor upon a dishonest one."

"I think with you. Each of us shall lock his door, and they can suspicion nothing."

A figure appeared by the open window at the end of the bar. Saul was busy with his letter, sitting half turned from the window, while Gaston, leisurely enjoying his wine, stood with his back square to the opening. The quill pen scratched on.

"I hope Mistress Moll will kill another goose before I pass this way again," muttered the man at the table. Then, aloud: "I shouldn't think that gold was so plentiful in this part of the world that yours would be left to lie unnoticed. But no one knows it's here; nor shall know from us."

A look of cupidity and exultation sprang to the fierce eyes of the face at the window, and then it gradually sank below the sill.

"I misdoubt me of the talkative man, our host," ran on Saul, speaking brokenly in his attempt to handle with his mind two subjects at once. "He helped carry the trunk upstairs last night, and knows its weight. And such as he can see the glint of a golden eagle through a two-inch stave of oak."

Chavannes drained his glass and set it down. Drawing a lace-bordered handkerchief from his breast pocket, he wiped his lips daintily, then

gently shook the fabric before his face, thereby releasing the peculiar scent of patchouli.

"The trunk is triple-banded," he said, "and the lock a new design which is claimed impossible to pick. Nothing short of high-handed burglary could harm us, *mon garcon*."

Saul was scanning with his eyes the concluding words of his short note.


"—I hope you are well, and that father will improve rapidly. Give him my love, and keep a vast measure for yourself. In regard to the cause of my leaving home, I want to say that I am already beginning to see things in a slightly different light, and I hope by the time I return it will be to receive yours and father's blessing. To-day I am starting on an adventure which will likely provide some excitement, but no danger."

With the corner of his mouth curved in a faint smile as he pictured Aunt Emmeline's reception of this message, Brentley added another term of endearment, then quickly got his letter ready for the post.

"Now to breakfast," he said, rising. "I feel as if I could eat a saddle-flap. Stay here, Dhu, good lad"—to the collie that arose at the same instant and started to follow—"Mistress Molly may not like nice dogs in her dining room, though she lets them sleep with their master. Lie down, and watch the good housewife's store of liquor."

Obedient to the voice he loved and to the gesture accompanying it, the intelligent animal, with a slanting upward glance of understanding and submission, walked back to the bar and dropped to the floor in his favorite posture, hind quarters on one hip, elbows flat and chin resting on his extended paws.

As Saul and his friend passed from the room in quest of breakfast, a slinking figure doubled the



corner of the house near which the emblemless sign hung, and swiftly crossed the yard to the highway. There, hugging the fence next the inn, where weeds and bushes formed an effectual screen, he ran rapidly but furtively for a quarter of a mile. Here he loosed a big black horse tethered to a locust sapling and rode as if pursued toward New Market.

Ham, fried chicken, eggs and rich coffee have never been despised by good stomachs, and both Gaston and Saul did full justice to it that sweet Spring morning at the Limping Dog. They were the sole guests of the inn the preceding night, and ate their meal alone. Moll, ever solicitous of their comfort, was in and out with hot bread, and kept steaming coffee flowing into their cups so fast that they had to bid her desist. Gaston finished first, but one could not wonder at this, considering all he bore upon his mind. Then he was a trifle more delicate at his food than our sturdy Saul, who, while possessing refinement of manner, believed in the strengthening quality of lots of meat, with which the table was well provided.

"The sun is here," said Gaston, presently, as a yellow shaft darted through the window and fell upon his sleeve.

The remark may have been idle, but it had a beneficent effect upon the hungry Saul.

"No more stout before breakfast when there's swift work to be done," he replied, smiling and pushing back his chair. "No, no, Mistress Higbee"—waving Moll aside as she appeared at that moment with an extra platter—"we are full nigh to bursting already." Then, as the men arose: "We leave you for a while this morning. It may be we return to-night, and it may be several days. Consider our respective rooms engaged, however, until we get back. And here is an earnest that

we are not running away." Whereat he deftly slipped a yellow coin into Moll's willing hand.

"Oh, sir!" replied the delighted landlady, bobbing and smiling, "an' I could not blame you had you left post-haste at peep o' day, considerin' that varlets set upon you. But it's proud I am to be honored with the likes o' you both, an' your rooms are kep' for you, as you say."

A heavy step, followed by an oath and a summons joined, came from the tap-room. Moll flung up her hands, rolled her head on her fat neck with a despairing look, then flew to respond. Her two guests followed, mildly curious as to the cause of the uproar. As they crossed the threshold, they stopped for a moment side by side.

A huge man was standing just within the door which gave into the yard. A black, sombrero-like hat looped up at one side and caught with a large silver buckle was on his head. He was booted to the knee, banded by a broad belt of black leather in which a pistol was thrust at one hip and a knife at the other. He had a luxurious brown beard which swept his massive chest half way to his waist, and his left hand was swathed in bandages.

"When did your public take to settin' dogs to watch it?" he bawled, even as the friends entered.

Roderick Dhu had not even lifted his head, but as every gaze turned upon him they could see that his eyes were glowing sulphurously as he held them fastened upon the newcomer. Also the hair upon his back had risen, and as they watched he slowly gathered his hind legs beneath him.

Mack Leek whipped out his pistol with another oath and turned furiously upon Brentley, whose hand had crept under his jacket to the revolver butt hidden there.

"Will you call your damned beast off, or must

I put a bullet through 'im?" stormed the big man, his face reddening angrily and his eyes flashing.

"The dog won't harm you if you don't molest him—or me," Saul replied, coming slowly forward until he stood between the collie and the infuriated man. "It would be better for you not to attempt to harm him."

"Huh! Don't I know better?" flung back Leek, thrusting out his bandaged hand. "What's I doin' to 'im when he sunk his teeth in that fist?"

"He was doubtless wiser than I at the time," returned Saul steadily, "for at first yesterday morning I was inclined not to doubt your honesty."

Mack Leek took two steps, then stood with chest out and straddled legs before Brentley, the picture of braggadocio. A growl came from near the bar, and the yellow-and-white ally was on his feet, slipping forward. Almost simultaneously Chavannes had moved to a spot quite close to Saul, his right hand thrust in the breast of his frilled shirt.

"What do you mean, whipper-snapper?" thundered the pseudo horse trader, his eyes flashing in menace.

Brentley put one hand back to stop the advance of Dhu, then answered promptly.

"More than I care to say just now, but you will know in time—I think in a very short time." He was sorely tempted at this point to throw off all concealment and charge Leek with the abduction of Margot, but the thought of Gaston checked him. The Frenchman would doubtless attempt the life of the kidnapper then and there. But the bravado of the big fellow was so offensive that Saul could not resist a covert thrust. Bending his body slightly forward, he gazed meaningly into the

stormy eyes fronting him and said: "Have you forgotten I came down the river?"

It was a simple question, but its effect upon Mack Leek was electrical. He took a backward step, sheathed his pistol, then grasped his whiskers and wound them around and about his hand, till presently they resembled a twisted rope of brown corn-silk. That moment the doorway was darkened by the quiet entrance of two figures. Mack Leek, grinning evilly at a thought which that moment jumped into his brain, suddenly swung his arm back to strike the man who had spoken, intending then to run or fight, as the ensuing condition warranted. But the taller of the two who had just arrived dextrously slid his arm beneath the backdrawn one, and by a muscular twist sent the horse trader whirling toward the end of the bar, against which he brought up with a thump.


Little Sam Pottle took a deep breath, calmly thrust his hands in his trousers pockets, and turned his round, good-natured face to the group by his side.

"What's the trouble about?" he asked, shifting his position somewhat as he caught a faint odor of some strange perfume.

Leek strode forward before anyone could answer, purple-visaged and breathing hard.

"*This* is the trouble!" he exclaimed, producing his wounded hand. "That young outlander set his dog on me down at the ferry yestiddy mornin', an' he chawed me terrible. A minute ago I come here to see Moll on a matter o' business, and got an insult from the same chap."

Little Sam Pottle laughed openly at this speech, while Big Sam echoed it in a softer key.

"That yarn'd make a schoolboy 'shamed of  eff," ventured Big Sam.

"It's the fust time I've ever knowed you to be skeerd of a dog—or a man either," supplemented Little Sam, viewing keenly the sullen, truculent visage.

Saul spoke.

"The truth is, gentlemen. that my dog merely protected me yesterday morning when Mr. Leek attempted to swamp my boat by jumping his horse into it from the shore. He fell short, then tried to overturn me, with the result you see."

"Speakin' o' hosses," said Little Sam, his face hardening on the instant, "you ain't seen no stray, Mack, yestiddy or the night before? We've lost one."

He hitched his sagging trousers and watched the effect of his words.

"No, I ain't seen none," came the ready answer. "What kind was it? One o' your best?"

"Out o' Sinkhole Field bunch. None better."

"When did you miss 'im?"

"Yestiddy mornin'. He strayed the night before—or was stole."

Leek shot a swift glance at the speaker, but the steady eyes which met his caused him to shift his own.

"I ain't seen it," he repeated, surlily, and turned toward the door.

"He was a bay with white stockin's an' a good sixteen hands," Little Sam called after him. "You're a trader, an' if you find 'im let me know."

If the other heard he gave no sign, but strode on over the worn flagstones to his waiting horse.

"My name is Brentley," said Saul, taking Little Sam's hand, "and I want to thank you for what you did just now. This is your father, I suppose?" shaking hands with Big Sam. "I never saw sire and son look more alike."

"Mr. Pottle, Mr. Brentley," said Moll, recovering from the perturbation begotten by the interrupted brawl. "Him we call Big Sam, an' him we call Little Sam, us as live hereabout an' have known 'em always. An' that's a funny sayin' to strangers, seein' as the little one is bigger than the big one."

"Very natural, though," said Brentley, and proceeded to introduce Gaston to the drovers.

They took the slender fingers which he offered in an abashed way, then drew back uneasily, as though proximity to the neatly attired, smelly foreigner might work them some harm.

"I'm sorry for the trouble I've had with that fellow," ran on Saul, in easy conversation, placing a hand on Big Sam's shoulder, "but I couldn't help it. I told you the truth a while ago."

"Mack Leek's the pest o' this county," was the quick reply. "He's a thief, an' a footpad, an' some say a cutthroat. He pertends to trade horses for a livin', but if he ain't stole one o' ours, then the Jedgment Day's a fraud!"

Whereupon the yeoman spat through the open doorway by way of emphasis, and shook his head.


"Come on, pap," broke in Little Sam. "We'd better be goin'. . . . We're crossin' the river for some hogs we've bought," he added, by way of explanation, "and are goin' in the big wag'n to haul 'em home." He pointed toward the road where two sleek mules stood hitched to a heavy-bedded farm wagon.

"Do you pass New Market?"

"Straight through."

"Would you mind two passengers that far? My friend and I are bound thither this morning, and have been wondering if we'd have to go afoot."

Big Sam: "Git right in!"



Little Sam: "Welcome as can be!"

Brentley rushed back to the kitchen to give Moll another reassuring word and caution her to see that his letter got off safely. Then presently they were bumping and clattering down the road in the spreading sunshine, the fresh breeze in their faces.

Now, ere scarcely a quarter of a mile had been traversed, they drew near a quaint little dwelling which appeared to be made of logs, as much as they could see for the vines which clambered about its door and over its tiny windows. A path of beaten down wood ash mixed with sand led up to the door, and down this path as our adventurers came on toddled a weazened old man. He reached the roadside before the wagon came abreast, and held up his cane as a sign that it should halt.

Little Sam drew up his team.

"Well, Uncle Jacky, what's the word this mornin'," he asked.

Uncle Jacky was visibly agitated. His hand was shaking violently on the top of his stick as he lowered it to lean upon it, and his head had a slightly palsied motion which was not habitual.

"Hey?" he began, in a querulous key, coming forward a step or two and peering at Saul and Gaston, who had perched themselves upon the side of the wagon bed. His wrinkled face lit up as he caught sight of the Frenchman.

"You be the youngun I seen at Manse Higbee's las' night, an' you help me on with my coat, civil an' kind. But who be t'other?"

He perked his head toward Saul.

"My friend, Mr. Brentley," said Gaston.

"An' be ye from the Limpin' Dog, direc'?"

"Yes."

"Then ye saw Mack Leek, what the devil'll git when all's done, but did ye see t'other?"

"He was alone."

"T'other'n was before 'im the matter of a half hour—Georgey Snipper he was, a wastrel an' a houn'! I know 'im. They run together o' nights. I know, an' I'm not skeered to talk. I know Mack Leek's a vile varlet an' has got a robbin' band, an' Georgey Snipper's one of 'em. An' you never seen Georgey Snipper?"

He peered eagerly into each face above him, his mouth agape.

"We saw no stranger till the big man came and tried to pick a fight with me," said Saul.

"Then there's deviltry afoot—devil's doin's is on the road!" declared Uncle Jacky, shaking his head and drawing the back of a dried-up hand across his lips. "Listen to me, Sammy Pottle, an' you younguns, too. I set a mighty store by yarb tea. Hit, an' good liquor, hev fetched me well into the nineties. This mornin' when I riz I 'membered that my yarbs was gittin' pow'ful low, so I puts up the road todes Manse's for some calamus root. They's a little patch grows in a fence corner 'cross the road jes' 'fo' you git to the house. Well, when I got there I dug my calamus root, an' hit's good day but the sun hadn't riz, an' happenin' to look todes Manse's—what'd I see?" He paused a moment to gaze triumphantly at his auditors. "I seen a feller all doubled up-like scroochin' 'round the corner from todes the tap-room like he'd stole somethin'. He's watchin' behind 'im, an' I kind o' eased back o' some pokeberry bushes. He loped 'cross the yard pow'ful peart, an' when he re'ch the road I knowed 'im, an' hit's Georgey Snipper. He kep' hissself all bent over same as like he'd stole somethin', an' lit out down that fencerow like a black snake. Then after while I heerd a hoss a-runnin', an' I went home with my calamus root.

Then soon's I'd et my breakfas', here come Mack Leek ridin' by. Now! Who says the devil stays in hell?"

He thumped his stick upon the ground and nodded sagely to each of his listeners.

Gaston's lips parted for a question, but Saul put a warning hand upon his arm.

"Between daylight and sunup, Uncle Jacky?" he asked, in quite matter-of-fact tones.

"Aye. Breakfas' was gittin' in the kitchen, fer I seen the smoke."

"And he came from the corner where the tap-room is?"

"Aye. Bain't I been a-goin' there for fifty year?"

"It's strange we didn't see him. We were in the room at the time, taking a drink. Then I wrote a letter. And he slunk away in a hurry, as though he didn't want anyone to see him?"

"Aye; an' was I younger I'd show you how he come. All hooped over he was, an' hit was Georgey Snipper."

Saul turned to Gaston, whose face betrayed his excitement, and slowly closed one eye.

"Well," he said, "we didn't see him, and if he stole anything it wasn't from us."

"Hit was Georgey Snipper," again asserted Uncle Jacky, although no one had seen fit to doubt the identity of the prowler.

"The end of it'll be that we'll have to git together an' run that gang out o' the country," remarked Big Sam. "In my opinion a fust-rate hangin' or two wouldn't do no harm."

"You'd better toddle up the road an' tell Manse," drawled Little Sam, gathering up his lines. "That feller warn't layin' 'round for any good, an' no hones' man wants to be hid."

He clucked to his mules.

Under the cover of the rattle of the wagon Brentley spoke in Chavannes' ear.

"Shall we go back?"

"No!" came the immediate rejoinder. "That fellow heard our conversation and has told his chief the gold is there. But Margot is yonder! She may be suffering, and every minute means much. It would take time to negotiate a ransom. Let's on, and find her quickly!"

Saul reached for the other's hand, and squeezed it hard.

"Within another twenty-four hours, if possible!" he said.

XIII

Being from its very nature unlucky, tells of a drop of bitterness which falls into Dorothy's cup of love.

"Aunt Hittie, tell me, really, what you think of him."

Dorothy paused in her morning dusting before the great, gilt-framed mirror above the mantel, whether by chance or intent it is not our office to say. But it is no breach of manners to say she noted her reflection, and forthwith began to perk and turn her pretty head and finger the ruffled and laced cap atop it.

The buxom lady seated in a low chair by the window, with a sock and darning materials in her lap, gave a fat sigh.

"Well-enough looking, I suppose," she replied, with no trace of enthusiasm.

Mistress Dorothy drew nearer the mirror and pulled a half-hidden curl from under the edge of the cap.

"Don't you think him handsome?"

"When I was young, girls didn't take up with every stranger they met in the road."

"But he helped me out of the ditch, and was so nice and courteous. And think how things have worked out! He had dear Margot's note directing him to come here, and now he has volunteered to find her. . . . Aunt Hittie, do you believe in marriage?"

"Child! Are you daft?" turning a scandalized

visage toward the young girl. "What do you mean, pray?"

Dorothy slowly ran her dust cloth along the lower border of the mirror.

"I mean, do you believe in love—love at first sight, and marriage?"

Miss Mehitabel's hands dropped over her work.

"You must be trying to perpetrate a joke, Dorothy," she said, severely; "but if I were you I'd choose another subject."

"I'm not joking. I just want your opinion. I know what I believe."

Something like a gasp came from the window.

"Dorothy Pembroke! You, with your blood and breeding and education in the east, to fall in love with a man who tramps about with a bundle on a stick! I won't believe it!"

"I didn't say I was in love. I asked you if you believed in love, and marriage—and said I had an opinion."

"But you implied you were, which amounts to the same thing. And I am shocked!"

There was a large element of mischief in Dorothy's nature, and this ingredient prompted her to continue, in a politely argumentative tone, while moving quietly about with her dust cloth.

"I can't see why such an ordinary thing as that should shock you, auntie. Weren't you ever in love?"

Miss Mehitabel darted a keen glance in the direction of the voice, but the owner of it was kneeling by a big rocker with her face the other way, busy at her task.

"I *thought* I was once, when I was a snip of a girl—like you—but thank heaven I found out better before it was too late."

"Then you don't believe in those things?"

"Not as a rule."

"I do. I think it right and natural. Why, everything in creation has a mate, auntie. Had you never thought of that? And do you think it right that humans, the highest form of creation, should go through life singly and apart? It's unnatural."

"In mercy's name, where did you get all that?"

Again the darning was temporarily suspended, and an amazed old maid sat dumfounded before the philosophy of youth.

"I didn't get it anywhere. It's just a simple fact, which some people overlook. If I thought I had to pass through life unwed I'd—I'd almost as soon die."

"*Dorothy!* Don't ever make a speech like that where others can hear you. It's unmaidenly!"

"Of course, I wouldn't tell a man that, Aunt Hittie, but it's true, and nothing to be ashamed of. The birds mate, and the squirrels mate, and everything else mates; then why shouldn't people mate?"

"Don't use the word 'mate' in referring to people. It's inelegant. And I'd advise you to think a good long time before intrusting your happiness to any man. Am I to understand that you truly *love* this stranger whom you met *yesterday*?"

Dorothy, finished with the rocker, now sat in it and faced squarely her perturbed relative.

"I don't exactly know, auntie. It does seem an awfully short time, doesn't it? But if it should prove true, I would want and expect your sympathy and advice. You see, I have no other to go to."

Miss Mehitabel sniffed, and batted her lids several times as though her vision had become suddenly clouded.

"This is all confidential, of course," Dorothy went on. "Nothing may come of it but, Annt

Hittie, when I look at Saul something tingly goes all over me. Is that love, do you suppose?"

A recollection from the far past put the answer on Aunt Hittie's tongue.

"I think that is love, dear."

"Oh, auntie!"

And Dorothy clasped her knee, and set her teeth on her lower lip, and looked actually frightened for the space of ten seconds.

The darning needle again attacked the diminishing hole, and another sigh came from the window.

"Never forget that, in heart affairs, it is unbecoming and unladylike for a girl to make any advances whatever. I trust you will remember that."

"Yes, ma'am," very meekly.

"And as you have chosen to confide in me I must expect full confidence. Has Mr. Brentley shown any evidence of affection?"

"He seems to like me——"

"*Like* you! And you have allowed yourself——"

"No, no, auntie! You didn't let me finish. He has given me unmistakable evidence that his heart is touched."

"Such as——"

"Oh, in little ways one can't describe. He recited a couplet to me, and said he wrote verses."

"What was the couplet?"

And though the words had been ringing in her ears ever since she heard them, Dorothy fibbed without a blush.

"Something about 'honey' and 'love'. I can't recall just how it ran."

"He didn't call *you* 'honey'!"

"Oh, no! That was in the verse. It was the

honey that bees make. He said he composed the couplet, and it was very pretty."

"That's not a good sign. Poetry makers are usually mighty poor stuff for men."

"But what of Chaucer, and Shakespeare, and Milton, and——"

Aunt Hittle's hand went up.

"The first two are positively indecent, and the last one, poor fellow, was blind. There was some excuse for him, but there is no excuse for an able-bodied man with all his faculties writing poetry. One never saw a poet or a musician who was worth a pinch of snuff as far as real work is concerned."

"But Saul doesn't make his living writing poetry. He's able to write it, that's all; and I think it an accomplishment."

"That's the second time I've heard 'Saul'. Has your intimacy ripened to such an extent within twenty-four hours that you call each other by your first names?"

Dorothy hung her head guiltily.

"Has it?"

"He wouldn't promise to find Margot until I agreed."

"And he calls you Dorothy!"

"Yes, ma'am—but it's to be a secret and you mustn't tell, yet. You see there's no real harm in it. It's just a little unconventional on such a short acquaintance, yet I think Margot's release is worth it, don't you?"

"I'm afraid you drive a poor bargain. You should have made him find Margot first, then the thought of the favor would have spurred him on."

"It never occurred to me, and he seemed so earnest about it, and he speaks so sweetly. I—I rather like it."

"I suppose in the next generation the girls will be proposing to the men. When *I* was a girl no young man dared use my first name to my face."

Dorothy thought of Saul's opinion of the name, and did not doubt the statement was entirely true.

"But the conditions were so extraordinary in my case. And he's really a charming gentleman. You noticed that, I am sure, when he was here yesterday."

"He has a pleasant manner, I'll admit, and deports himself well."

"And his family is just as good as ours. You've heard of Brentleys. They've served their country in war and in politics."

Miss Mehitabel placed the mended sock aside and picked up another.

"I didn't altogether like the story he told us about leaving home just because he wanted an adventure. There's a fast streak in that blood, and young men are reckless."

Dorothy lifted her head with a startled gesture.

"What do you mean, Aunt Hittie?" she asked, in a changed voice.

"There was one of that name brought trouble on Kitty Galory, who was old Sis Tomperby's daughter. Sis didn't live here then, but the story floated about the country. It may have been this boy's father, and it may have been some one else. It happened nearly twenty years back. But the thought has come to me that maybe this Saul Brentley left home on account of trouble with some girl."

"Oh, auntie! Don't be so unjust! I'm sure you're wrong! He seems so clean-hearted and carefree. If trouble lay on his mind he couldn't be so buoyant. And if his father did sin——"

"The sins of the fathers shall be visited upon

the children unto the third and fourth generation.' ”

“That’s archaic, and heathenish, and I won’t accept it!” exclaimed Dorothy. “If Saul is good he is good, and no wrongdoing of his father could make him otherwise!”

“That is a very unchristian sentiment, my child.”

“It’s a very human one.”

There was no immediate reply. From the side porch the voice of the broken-winged mockingbird came harshly, imitating the cry of an angry jay. Then as her mind swiftly assimilated what her aunt had said, an alien fear took hold of Dorothy and she shook, as from a slight chill.

“I’m sorry you spoke of your suspicions,” she said. “While I am sure you are wrong, still I can’t help but think of it, and it hurts.”

She arose, removing her dust-cap.

“It is my duty to safeguard you in every way possible,” replied Aunt Hittie, “and I am sure Jonathan would approve what I have said.”

This reference to her father brought back to the girl that moment on the preceding day when she had presented him to Saul, and Captain Pembroke had striven to recall when he had heard that name. It was the same Brentley Aunt Hittie had spoken of; she had remembered the circumstances while her brother had let it pass from his mind.

“Straws show which way the wind blows,” resumed Miss Mehitable, with the merciless perseverance of some characters, “and if this young fellow’s father took advantage of Kitty Galory, Saul Brentley himself would bear watching.”


“I won’t listen to anything so unfair, Aunt Hittie,” answered the girl, her head up and her cheeks flaming; “and you probably forget that you are casting a reflection upon me, your niece.

I certainly don't intend to cut Mr. Brentley's friendship for the reason you give." She walked to the foot of a closed-in stairway ascending from a corner of the room. "Will you please have Uncle Bacchus bring Lady Satan around? I want to ride to New Market this morning."

She barely heard the response of "Very well" as she ran upstairs, for she was beset all at once by some emotions she had never felt before and could not at all understand.

As she rode toward the neighboring hamlet a quarter of an hour later she was still oppressed by a persistent mental uneasiness which she could not banish, for all she strove with her maiden commonsense to rid herself of certain haunting thoughts and so regain her poise. She wondered what her attitude toward Saul would be when she met him again, and her visit to New Market this morning had that hope as a basis. She wanted to see him, and talk to him, and decide within herself if he could possibly be a man who would do any low thing. Should her manner be different toward him when they met? Should she appear a little cold, and a little reserved? That wouldn't do, because that would be somewhat cowardly, and she didn't feel that way in the least. She was only conscious of a dull hurt somewhere in her breast. It was a kind of hurt she had never felt before—a continuous, contracting sort of pain in the region of her heart.

At last she managed to draw the spirited Lady Satan down to a walk, and forgetting for a moment the glorious sunshine and wide blue sky, she crossed her hands on the saddle-horn and went forward with bent head, thinking thoughts of her own. She looked up with a start when the black mare stopped still. Saul stood at her horse's head with one hand on the bridle near the bit, the



other pulling the cap from his head. They were almost at the identical spot where they had met the day before, and looking past the smiling, eager face so near her, Dorothy saw a wagon drawn by two mules going down the road to the ferry, while in the middle of the highway perhaps forty yards distant stood the figure of another man. The faithful Rhoderick Dhu was sitting on the grass to one side, his tongue lolling.

"Greeting, fair Dorothy!" exclaimed Saul, sweeping his cap almost to the ground in a profound bow. "Will you forgive a highwayman who only demands a smile and a few words of welcome?"

And two hasty steps brought him to her side, where he stood with expectant face and upheld hand.

Almost mechanically she put her hand in his, looking into his eyes with unconscious intensity. She found them gray and steady, with a trace of tenderness. Then as he suddenly began to close his fingers around hers with a gentle pressure, she flushed and jerked her hand away, but there was no rebuke in the smile which lighted her face.

Saul looked rueful.

"Girl of the honey-colored hair,
Tell me why you are so fair?"

"No compliments this morning, and no poetry," she replied. "Great deeds must be done to-day."

It was impossible in his presence to give ear to the little devils which had been riding with her. She put them away peremptorily, and continued—

"But before making your report, tell me, pray, who is yonder gentleman that seems undecided whether to come forward or stay where he is?"

The lone figure indeed appeared restless, for he could not remain in his tracks.

"That is a friend whom I hope to present to you in a very few minutes. We came hither from the inn in that wagon which you perhaps saw. I observed your approach, and it is at my bidding he stays yonder while I ran to meet you."

"For what purpose, I wonder?"

"A brief conversation with you alone, lady, before the work of the day begins."

Dorothy did not answer. There was something in his tone and glance which sent her heart racing.

Brentley went on, speaking low and earnestly.

"Did I dream, or did you place your hand upon my head at parting yesterday afternoon, and bid me God-speed and win—for your sake?"

Her voice was distinct, but a trifle uneven, when she spoke.

"I did lay my hand upon your head, and bid you God-speed, and win."

"For your sake?—Or did I dream?"

"For my sake. I said it."

His hand came up and covered both of hers on the saddlehorn.

"They were the dearest words any man has ever heard, sweet Dorothy. Did you mean them?"

"I meant them, Saul."

"Oh wonderful girl! Little did I know when I drifted on the river's breast two nights ago that I was floating into heaven!"

He felt her quiver, and saw her white teeth press her lip. Then with a quick, impulsive movement she leaned from the saddle toward him and gazed searchingly in his eyes.

"Will you tell me the truth, without evasion, if I ask you a question?"

"I will," he said, wondering what she could mean.

"Then answer: was the reason you have given us for leaving your home the entire cause?"

She was watching him closely, and he could see that she was hoping his reply would be in the affirmative. But the clear eyes above him compelled the truth, and he had given his word.

"No," he said, his face clouding, but his look unfaltering.

"It really was incidental to the true cause, was it not?"

"Yes."

Her cheeks had lost their rich color and her lips were strained, but she was brave.

"What was it—the real reason?"

Saul put up his other hand to her elbow in a gesture of entreaty.

"Don't ask me now! Not this moment—not this morning. Let me take this brief meeting, as it has been up to this moment, with me when I go presently to find your friend. Then I will answer your question, truly and fully."

She sat erect and looked past him at a field of young wheat which rippled from her in soundless waves.

"Is it so bad as that?" she asked, in dull tones.

"No; but I feared you would not understand."

She faced him again.

"I must know now. Was it because of a girl?"

"Yes. I could explain the circumstances if I had time."

Dorothy's chin went up and her delicate brows arched.

"Your friend is approaching," she said, very coldly. "No doubt he thinks we have acted most uncivilly."

Conscious that an acute mental misery had all at once seized him, Saul stepped back without another word, and wheeled. Gaston was really com-

ing down the lane. Brentley beckoned him forward and, as he presently stopped with bared head, spoke.

"Miss Pembroke, permit me to present Chevalier Chavannes, arrived last night from Philadelphia."

Dorothy's face became radiant on the instant, and she held out her hand with a cry of surprise and delight. Chavannes bent low with his hand on his breast.

"And you are Margot's friend, of whom she has written! How glad I am to know you, and how good it is for you to be here!"

Gaston advanced and bowed again over the fingers which he took.

"I have heard of you, too, lady," he replied, smiling; "and with your gracious permission I would add that none of the reports which have reached me were colored."

Mistress Dorothy gave a ringing laugh at this speech, and shook her head.

"Fie on you, m'sieu! But I should chide the nation, and not the individual. I have been told your countrymen were all gallant."

"A boor would be inspired to gallantry were he in my shoes this moment," retorted the ready Gaston.

"No wonder you've won our Margot, with such speeches as that on your tongue."

Chavannes turned slyly toward Brentley, who stood with half a scowl on his good-looking face.

"And here is one who no longer ago than last night said something you'd be delighted to hear."

"Oh, he has that for every maid, no doubt!" laughed Dorothy, airily, wickedly wounding afresh the poor fellow, who could say nothing in his defense just then. "You must come on home with me at once, and meet father and auntie, and tell

us what you have decided upon. It's not far, and were you not bound thither, anyway?"

"Indeed we were. But let Saul speak; it is he who leads."

"We want horses and a guide," explained Brentley, "and I knew of no other place to go for them. The quicker we can get them and make a start, the better it will be."

Briskly and decidedly Saul talked, as if for the time there were only one thing to do and all else must take second place. Dorothy was conscious of some amazement at his sudden display of seriousness, but she replied in like maner.

"You are right. Come."

And turning the black mare around, the three started back down the lane. Saul was on her right and Gaston on her left, and consequently most of Dorothy's remarks went in the latter direction. She was more piqued than hurt, for she really did not believe for a moment that Saul had been guilty of any grave misdemeanor. But what woman could have resisted that opportunity to grow distant and haughty, and so put her lover on nettles for a time? Certainly we must not blame too harshly this fair daughter of Eve. The chance had come and she had taken it, and now she was miserable and vexed with herself; and Saul was miserable and forming new cuss-words in his mind, and everything was as it should be between two young people who were at their particular stage in the game of love.

XIV

Informing the reader that love is the strangest thing in life except a woman, and bringing our brave hero and his equally brave friend to the scene of their search for a damsel in distress.

Two hours later they were ready to start. A detailed account of all that had happened at the inn had been given and discussed, including the advisability of offering ransom. This had been voted down. Captain Pembroke gave it as his opinion that the man who attempted to enter Saul's room was either Mack Leek or Gypsy George, and that the person Uncle Jacky Bibb had seen leaving the inn had been sent there to investigate the result of the attack and had accidentally overheard the conversation in the tap-room. Then needs of the moment came up.

Horses had been immediately available from the stable of Captain Jonathan, but the question of a guide proved harder to settle. At last, in lieu of anyone more desirable, it was decided to send Uncle Bacchus in this capacity. The old negro was tough and active for his years, and was thoroughly familiar with the country round about for many miles. He was summoned before the council, which held its meeting in the sitting room to the right of the big hall. It had been agreed not to acquaint him with the nature of the journey, for his notorious cowardice would in that event most likely have caused him to feign sudden illness in order to stay at home. Presently he stood in the hall doorway.

"Uncle Bacchus," began Captain Jonathan, bluffly, "here are two gentlemen, my friends, who want to go to the river cliffs."

"Yessuh, marse."

"You know where they are, of course, and the best and quickest way to reach them?"

"Yessuh, marse; but dey's cliffs *en* cliffs in dem regums. Dey's *miles* on 'em; yessuh."

"You're right. Could you go with these gentlemen and show them the way?"

"Who?—Me?"

"I'm talking to you, ain't I?"

"Yessuh, marse, you sho is. An' you're talkin' skeery talk, too!"

"I don't want any foolishness out o' you now, Uncle Bacchus."

"I ain't talkin' no fool talk, marse. Dem cliffs is ha'nted!"

"Do you know the way to 'em?"

"I used run 'roun' dah plenty when I's a young man."

"Well, then, you show these gentlemen how to get there. I don't mean show 'em; I mean take 'em."

"When dey gwi, marse John?"

"Right now."

"An' when dey comin' back?"

"I don't know, and they don't either."

The old darky rolled his eyes toward Saul and Gaston.

"You gem'n comin' back 'fo' de night?" he asked.

"We may be there several nights," Brentley answered.

"Fo' Gawd's sake, marse John! De ribber cliffs at night?"

Chavannes turned.

"We won't need him after we get there, cap-

tain. Indeed, it would be better for him to come and go, bringing us food each day in case our task is prolonged."

"Dat soun's mo' lak business to me!" muttered Uncle Bacchus.

"All right," assented Captain Jonathan. "Just as you say about that. . . . Hittie, you'd better have Cynthy wrap up somethin' for 'em for to-day and to-night."

Miss Mehitabel left the room at once to prepare a lunch, while Uncle Bacchus, with a bow and a scrape, "lowed he'd go tek a look at de hosses."

Saul spoke.

"Don't you think it would be better if the gold were brought here? That outlaw will be almost certain to try for it at the inn."

The farmer slapped his thigh.

"The very thing!" he cried, heartily. "Certainly that dev'l'd get it if left there over-night, if he had to burn Manse out. I'll go myself, and have the trunk here safe and sound by midday."

"Shall I write an order to the landlord?" suggested Gaston, politely.

Captain Jonathan roared.

"Order! Bless you, no! Manse knows me and I know him and he'd take my word as quick as he would an order."

"The room is locked. This is the key." Gaston passed it over as he spoke.

Saul's mood had been gloomy since the unfortunate termination of the talk in the lane. On their way back to the house Dorothy had all but ignored him. It was perhaps natural that she should give most of her attention to the new-comer, but Brentley's heart was sore, for he felt that she had not given him a chance. He had acted fairly, and she had taken snap judgment of him instead of allowing him to explain. And

though her eyes were still like dew-washed violets and her lips like geranium petals, he persistently refused to look toward her during the time they were in the sitting room. He had taken part in the general conversation, but his face had a foreign, stern expression, and his voice sounded hard. Dorothy had watched him furtively all through the conference, and her little heart had begun to beat in dismay. She had acted hastily, maybe cruelly, because he had been so manly and truthful. And as the time drew near for him to leave upon her errand, the sly little minx began to lay a plan. He was going into danger for her, bravely, uncomplainingly, because he had given her his promise and was too much of a gentleman to break it. When all the party presently arose, the girl slipped from the room without a word, crossed the hall and went into the parlor on the other side, leaving the door partly ajar. Saul noted her departure and wondered at it, but of course said nothing, supposing she would return presently.

"I hope you'll have luck, gentlemen," said Captain Jonathan, "but you've surely got a tough job."

"I think we'll win," said Saul.

And Gaston: "I know we will."

"Well, youth and love are a hard team to fight," agreed the host. "I'll see to the trunk, and agree to keep you in food while you're gone. It's a God-forsaken district you're headed for—but here's Hittie with the grub. I'll see you off." And turning, he followed his sister outdoors, Chavannes at his heels.

Brentley lagged behind, taking slow and short steps, wondering what had become of Dorothy. Was she truly hurt with him and already in the yard, waiting with the others to bid him a formal

farewell? If so, well and good! He would be no woman's football, however beautiful and charming she might be. And throwing up his head he strode firm-footed into the hall. Opposite the parlor door he heard a sound which stopped him. It was a stifled sob, and it came from the room to his right. A second later he was across the portal, peering here and there through the semi-gloom which filled the apartment. A spinet stood in the furthest corner, and leaning against it was a shadowy shape. A second trembling sob told him who it was. Crossing the floor swiftly, a joyous elation filling him, Saul boldly put his arm around the shaking shoulders and drew Dorothy to him with tender strength. He gently pulled her hands down from her eyes, and though it was almost dark where they stood she would not let him see her face, but turned and hid it on his chest.

"Blessed little lamb!" he soothed, stroking the rebellious hair and bending his head that he might speak softly. "Don't cry, my sweet! Look up at me and give me a blessing from your eyes before I ride."

A trembling sigh, a snuffle, and one arm went slowly up and stole around his neck.

Then for the first time Saul drew her round young body to him and knew the subtle warmth of her pliant grace. He could feel her firm breast against his side and the turbulent heaving of her bosom against him. Then for a moment fire filled his veins and scorched his brain and he came to himself only when she gave a choked cry.

"Forgive me! Forgive me!" he muttered, still holding her to him with unconscious force. "I wouldn't hurt you for God's throne! Now tell me you love me as I do you, and let me go!"

Dorothy's answer came in a muffled whisper from his shirt front.

"Tell me it's not true—that there is no other woman—that you've never loved anyone else—that I am everything and all—and will be forever—and—and—and then I'll be happy!"

Throwing back her head, she looked at him and smiled.

"By Christ's love!" he vowed, "you are all that to me, and more! There is none other, nor ever shall be!"

"Oh, my Saul!"

And tiptoeing, she lifted him the red fruit of her lips.

Before he could realize this unexpected bounty steps sounded on the porch and the spinster aunt came hurriedly in, calling—"Dorothy!—Mr. Brentley!"

The lovers drew apart, simultaneously, the girl answering: "We're coming, Aunt Hittie! Here, in the parlor. I wanted to show Mr. Brentley our spinet heirloom."

"Indeed!" retorted Miss Mehitabel, marching into the almost dark apartment. "It's a mighty poor light to show anything off in." And hustling to a window she flung the green shutters wide. "Now, if Mr. Brentley wants to see the spinet, he may—but why have you been crying, niece?" Her eyes, aglow with suspicion, darted from one to another of the young people.

"Poor Margot!" glibly replied the seraphic hypocrite. "I suppose I cry because of her plight, and the thought of seeing her again, too. Women are such paradoxical creatures. Were I a man, I don't think I would look at one twice." She cast an adorable glance at the tall, big-shouldered figure which stood, a little abashed, at her side.

Miss Mehitabel's thin lips went in and her face assumed a severe expression.

"You can be flippant on quite serious occasions, niece, and you know that is something of which I never approve. . . . Mr. Brentley, I am sure they are waiting for you."

Saul bowed.

"Thank you, Miss Pembroke. I am coming." To Dorothy: "Won't you be kind enough to grant me a stirrup-adieu?"

"Surely. And when you return with poor Margot, I will play on the old spinet for you. It is very dear to us."

"It is thrice dear to me!" whispered Saul, as they trailed after Aunt Hittie, and he gave her hand a surreptitious squeeze.

They found Gaston already mounted, and Uncle Bacchus standing holding two horses by their bridles. Saul, accustomed to fine stock, knew at a glance that each of the animals was blooded.

"I must congratulate you on your stable, captain!" he cried, feeling so happy that he wanted to shout his joy to the high sky. "We've no better up our way, and that's a great concession."

"They're as good as any in this section, with the exception of one or two the Pottles own," granted Captain Pembroke, eyeing the three graceful beasts proudly. "You know you may have to run before this business is over, and if you do you don't want to get caught. This is yours, Brentley"—taking a chestnut by the bridle and leading him forward a few steps. "He never gets tired and can live on moss if necessary."

"Thank you, sir. And now I guess we'd best be off. As Uncle Bacchus goes and comes we will send word of our progress. We are staying till we find Miss LaTour."

Gladly would Saul have made conversation in-

definitely, for it took all his strength to leave the sweet presence standing on the grass so near, but he could see poor Chavannes restless in his saddle, and the time for parting was at hand.

"Good-bye, all!" he called, waving a farewell. Then he deliberately turned and grasped Dorothy's hand. "I am your knight in this adventure," he said, speaking low and swiftly, "and I am going to succeed." Then, smiling into her eyes: "How could I fail after the past fifteen minutes? Good-bye, my sweetheart!"

Wheeling, he swung himself to the saddle. Uncle Bacchus climbed astride his mount also and the little party set out.

Reaching the highway: "Do we go through New Market, Uncle Bacchus?" asked Saul.

"Yessuh, marse; straight t'roo."

"Isn't there another way? There are some people we don't want to meet now."

"Dey's a cut-off, yessuh, a lane lak; den we c'n go t'roo Marse Pottle's fiel'."

"All right, let's do that. Ride on ahead now. We'll keep you in sight and follow."

"Yessuh, marse."

The old darky touched his horse's ribs with his heel, and cantered forward until he had gained a position a score of rods in advance of the two friends.

"*Vive la France, mon garçon!*" exclaimed Brentley, a surge of intense feeling tightening his breast and creating a desire to shout aloud.

"Why so in particular, good Saul?" queried Gaston, turning a face which mirrored mild surprise.

"Because its lilies are white, for one thing, and so is my lady's neck. For another, it gave me you."

The speaker regarded his companion with a tender, musing smile.

Said Gaston: "I was wondering what kept you in the house when I was so eager to be off. She was almost malicious in the lane, yet I saw back of her forced gaiety. And she relented at the moment of departure?"

"Aye; sweetly, gloriously, heavenly. Love is a strange thing, m'sieu."

And having delivered this staggering truth, Brentley sighed heavily.

"But stranger than all else is woman; complex, mysterious, never to be understood."

"Your face is very smooth for your mind to ponder such deep things."

"I was thinking especially of the Lady Dorothy's recent behavior. I'll warrant there was slight, or no cause, for her conduct in the lane."

A quick frown wrinkled Saul's brow.

"That's as it may be, my chevalier. You see, there was another woman, and she made me confess it."

"Ah!"

Chavannes' eyes grew wider.

"Yes. Unfortunately there is a philandering streak in my blood, and that is the cause of my riding on this quest with you instead of biding at home in gentlemanly ease."

"Benevolent streak!" murmured Gaston, and dropping his reins, began to roll a cigarette.

"You'll forswear my company when you hear it all. She's a gypsy-like bar-maid with a face like a flower, and a heart like a live coal. Never averse to a maid, she bewitched me, by gad!"

"Don't censure yourself too severely. 'Bright angels have fallen ere thy time.' Any complications?"

"None, thank heaven, other than the plighting

of eternal troth, a solemn promise that I'll wed none other, and an equally solemn vow that I will return to her."

"All of which weighs on a man when he fain would be on with the new love. What are you going to do?"

"Wed Dorothy, by God's grace!"

"What will your bar-maid do?"

Brentley twisted in his saddle and shrugged his shoulders.

"Why ask such devilishly unpleasant questions, comrade? She's the sort that would put six inches of steel between your ribs, then laugh to see you die. She's a lovely savage, I tell you."

"There's an old saw about he who dances must pay the fiddler."

"Cold comfort, but very true, and I've never whined yet when the time for a settlement came."

"It's an awkward debt when the fiddler is Fate," philosophised Gaston, blowing a thin column of smoke toward his horse's ears.

Then for a time they rode in silence. Far ahead the bent figure of their guide preceded them. Presently Saul, lifting his head from a none too pleasant revery, saw Uncle Bacchus stop, get off his horse, and begin to take down a section of rail fence. When they had come up:

"This is the field we are to cross?" he asked.

"Yessuh—Marse Pottle's fiel'. T'other road ober yondah tek us to de cliff regums. Atter while we hab to leab hit en go t'roo de wil' wil'erness fo' 'bout a mile."

They passed through the gap, which Uncle Bacchus carefully rebuilt, then cantered across the grazing meadow. Away off to one side a magnificent drove of horses was cropping the young grass. They lifted their heads and looked at the

intruders, a statuesque and impressive group, while one of them neighed shrilly.

A very few minutes sufficed to bring our adventurers to the second road, and here Uncle Bacchus suggested they proceed faster, as it was his earnest desire to be well away from the "regums" before darkness began to fall. To this the young men gladly consented, for they were eager to begin their search.

With the increased speed of their horses conversation lagged, and stopped altogether after a few miles had been covered. They met very few people on the journey, and such as they encountered merely hailed them as they passed. One, in a cart, a red-checked girl of the yeoman class, turned to look again at the chalk-faced Chavannes, with his queer frilled shirt and dark velvet coat. Uncle Bacchus maintained the pace he had set at the beginning of the second stage of their trip and, uphill and down, the horses went forward with a tireless stride. Once at a certain speed, Saul discovered that his mount needed no urging to keep it, and was thus convinced of the absolute truth of Captain Pembroke's words regarding the animal's stamina.

Their general trend had been in an easterly direction, and when at last Uncle Bacchus wheeled into a by-road and headed southeast, the friends knew they were nearing their destination. On the horizon toward which they sped the earth formation lifted and was thickly wooded. Nearer, the ground was rugged and broken, with many pine- and cedar-dotted hillocks, barren and rain-washed. They were riding into forsaken country, and they became conscious of an atmosphere of loneliness. They felt inclined to whisper, rather than speak aloud, for the effect of the place was for silence. Saul looked at Gaston. The

young Frenchman's face was grave, and bore a strange expression of heart-hunger and sternness blended. His mouth was tight and his eyes merciless, and had they been standing together Saul would have put an arm around his shoulders and spoken some cheering word. For—burned into Gaston's consciousness—was the supreme fact that somewhere near was his heart's idol and mate; that she was in distress, perhaps in pain, and was longing and praying for deliverance.

After a time they reached fenceless territory, for the ground was not worthy of preservation, and here Uncle Bacchus reined up.

"Gem'n, we're heah!" he announced solemnly, and waved one bony hand ahead.

Neither replied for a moment, but sat their horses and surveyed the prospect. It was forbidding and discouraging enough, but it did not daunt them. They had come forth with an iron-willed purpose, and that purpose had to be accomplished.

"How did you stand it, my Scotchman?" asked Saul, suddenly, smiling down at the great collie which sat with mouth agape and slender pink tongue dripping water. The dog cast a quick glance up at his master and endeavored to wag his tail, with indifferent success.

Uncle Bacchus was eyeing the young men suspiciously. He had gone as far as he cared to on this expedition, and was anxious to start back. To his intelligence the delayed words of dismissal boded ill. So now he spoke again, a little louder.

"Gem'n, we're heah!"

"All right, Uncle Bacchus," replied Saul; "but where're the cliffs?"

"Yondah dey is! Gawd, man, you's right in de middle ob 'em!"

He stretched a long arm south.

"Very well. I guess we can find them now."

"Yessuh, marse, yessuh! You sho kin! Yon-dah dey is. You's ready to drap ober 'em mos' right now! 'N' heah's de grub 'n' truck. I'll fetch you mo' to-morrer."

"Good. One of us will be here to receive it exactly at noon. Tell the folks we hope to be home very soon."

"Yessuh, I sho tell 'em." He rolled his eyes fearsomely, and continued: "Whah you gem'n gwine spen' dis night?"

"Oh, somewhere in the woods yonder, near the river."

Uncle Bacchus shivered visibly.

"Dey's ha'nts dah, 'n' wull-o'-wusps!"

"What does he mean?" asked Gaston, noting the old darky's perturbation, but totally unable to understand his speech.

"He thinks the cliffs are haunted, and fears for our safety," explained Saul. To Uncle Bacchus: "We're not afraid, old gentleman, and we're both armed."

"You can't kill ha'nts!" asserted the negro, shaking his head, "'n' wull-o'-wusps leads you in de ribber. You better git 'way frum dem cliff regums when de night comes."

"We're not afraid, I tell you, and will get along all right. We'll look for you to-morrow at noon." Turning to Gaston, "Come, my boy, let's begin."

As they urged their horses toward the river the thud of galloping hoofs behind told them that Captain Pembroke's body servant was hastening back to the safety of home.

"I feel that success will come quickly," said Brentley, for the look on his friend's face had all at once grown fierce. "I feel it in my bones, as one of the niggers says at home."

Gaston did not smile, but he flashed back a

glance of appreciation. Quickly he thrust out his white, slender hand.

"Make a pact with me, Saul. To stay till we find her."

For a moment the two hands gripped, hard and fast.

"Till we find her, Gaston, it shall be!"

Then side by side, in silence, they rode on to their adventure, the great collie trailing, his shaggy skin slipping on his shoulders as he walked.

XV

Proceeding with the plot in a suitable manner, and ending, as did Chapter Eleven, with a voice calling in the night.

"Oh, Saul, look! Such grandeur!"

It was an hour later, and they stood near the edge of the northern line of cliff, their horses tethered a few yards away, and gazed down into the immense gulf of air at the bottom of which was the river. It was truly a prodigious spectacle, conducive to wonder and thought alike, and the sensitive mind of the Frenchman had at once grasped the marvel, and brought forth an involuntary exclamation.

"Yesterday," he continued, never taking his eyes from the stupendous vista presented eastward, "yesterday I rode all day long through the fairest, level land. Meadows upon meadows, and pleasant little swells, and musical brooklets, with herds innumerable. And to-day—this!"

Brentley smiled.

"And to-morrow it might be something just as different, did you post in another direction. Ours is a marvelous state, even to us who know it."

"But this—this!"

Chavannes swept his arm out impetuously.

"More marvelous than the Pyrenees or the Alps. Here are mountains upthrust by the cooling earth, perhaps in a month, perhaps in an hour. And how long has it taken water to cut that channel through the living stone, down those scores of feet—maybe an inch in a thousand years?"

"I had never thought of it that way," was the grave reply.

"It took not ages, but æons on top of æons. And the work goes on."

"We never grasp the real mystery and beauty of that with which we are familiar," returned Brentley. "Some one must come to whom it is new to discover a portion of its true charm."

Chavannes sighed.

"Shall we not begin?" he asked, his voice touched with awe now that he was face to face with the Herculean task.

"We must eat first, and then establish some sort of working base," the more practical Saul declared. "It is past noon; we have ridden hard, and must have nourishment to give us strength. Uncle Bacchus said we were in the middle of the cliff country, and I almost think he was right. They certainly stretch away in either direction as far as one can see. Come—it won't be long before we make a start."

He led the way back to the horses, and took from his saddle the bundle of provisions which Uncle Bacchus had transferred to him at parting. Then, sitting upon the ground under a small oak, the friends ate, tossing to the watchful and ready Roderick Dhu stray portions now and then.

"We'll have to make some arrangements for our horses," remarked Saul, "in spite of the captain's assertion that mine could live on moss. That's decidedly too scanty a diet for one of his build."

"Why not have the black man bring food for them when he brings ours?" quietly asked Chavannes.

"What a dunce I am!" laughed the other. "Of course he can swing a small sack of corn across

his saddle as easy as not. Well, that leaves us unprovided for."

"In what way?"

"Shelter. I love the open. A blanket around me and a coat under my head makes a royal resting-place, but—"

"Do you suppose me a weakling because I am slender and wear lace on my shirt?"

The query was accompanied by a shadowy smile.

"Why, no. But the idea of your sleeping out on the bare earth under the stars would never have occurred to me."

"I have done it often—in Normandy. The climate there may be more mild, but it's share and share alike with us until our quest is done."

"But a shelter of some sort is almost necessary," insisted Saul. "It may rain, and sometimes there would be need for a fire which one wouldn't care to have seen."

Chavannes remained silent, his jaws moving mechanically over a morsel of food. He was lunching lightly.


"There ought to be a deserted shack somewhere hereabout," pursued Brentley. "We'll probably run upon a hut or cabin in our wanderings, and when we do we'll occupy it for a base. . . . Why don't you eat something, man?"

Gaston, ignoring the question, placed a palm upon the ground and leaned forward.

"Do you suppose *he* knows we're out here?"

"Who?"

"The Bearded Devil. I heard what you said to him in the tap-room, although I knew you did not want me to, and I saw his subsequent actions. Don't you believe he abducted Margot and holds her a prisoner in this wilderness?"



The speaker's face had grown hard, and his eyes flamed.

Saul did not hesitate.

"I practically *know* it."

With a kind of hiss in his breath Gaston sat erect and swiftly drew two weapons from his person. He did this so quickly his companion could not tell where they had been secreted.

One was a beautiful pistol with an extremely long barrel and pearl-inlaid handle. The other was a Spanish stiletto with an eight-inch blade, a handle of some dark, carved wood, and a hilt of wrought brass.

"I have a premonition that the Bearded Devil will die before all is done, friend Saul, and either of these two things can kill him. If I am right, and the time comes when it's his life or ours, as I am sure it will—give him to me."

There was no evident anger or vindictiveness in the voice that spoke these words of such sinister import. The clouded face had cleared, too, and the chevalier looked as one who would have been far more in his sphere bowing over a lady's hand in a handsomely equipped salon, than in meeting a fierce-visaged giant of a bandit in deadly combat.

"Would you actually engage him—alone?" burst from Saul's astonished lips.

"Yes, and preferably with this."

He picked up the stiletto and balanced it on his palm.

"If you ever come within the sweep of his arms you are lost. Better shoot, and let him do the same."

"You have never seen me in action, friend, but I have trained—with this."

His eyes fell to the slim steel blade, and that moment there rushed to Saul's mind the vision of

the night before, when his friend had hurried to his assistance armed with this same weapon. Chavannes' voice went on, in a musing way, free from any boasting strain, and as he talked his eyes were on the needle-sharp blade.

"I have trained and I have succeeded. They called me 'The Cat,' because I was lithe and always kept my feet. This gentle manner and this laced linen scented with perfume cover a frame of steel. I like daintiness, but I am a man, and some day you will see. Feel."

He leaned over and thrust out his arm. Saul grasped the biceps with his fingers, and though the arm was not flexed it was as though he held a bar of iron.

"Phew! You've had me fooled, young man! I didn't exactly think you a dandy, but I did think perhaps you were soft."

"Then he is mine—the Big One? Remember, he has stolen my very heart from my bosom?"

"If it comes to that, he is yours."

"You are a very sweet friend to humor me thus. I thank you. Do you think he knows we are here?"

"Not yet, but he will learn it."

"Then—"

"God knows."

"I know!" cried Chavannes.

"What?"

"We'll trail him and find the hidden way!"

"A good idea, but he is shrewd, and I suspect would come by night. Let us depend on our own efforts first, and I suggest now we go west, being careful to watch especially the bends in the stream. Remember, I was sleeping and at the mercy of the current. I must have swung very close to have caught the tossed-out message in the boat."

"Had you only been awake!" murmured Gaston, and they went forward.

Creepers, low-growing bushes, and tangled, wind-tied grass made progress slow. These obstructions extended clear up to the lip of the gorge. Mingled with them were trees of many kinds, but none of any great height, for the soil was too thin to promote a sturdy growth. Of course the opposite side of the river was the only one which they could watch, and they scanned the huge gray and brown surface intently as they laboriously trudged along. As it chanced, the river flowed straight for nearly half a mile from their starting point, and while some crevices were discovered along this part of the journey, they were all horizontal openings and consequently gave the searchers no possible cause for hope. Once a long, dark scar, vertically placed, brought a low cry from Gaston's lips, but as they eagerly drew opposite they found it to be only a stain caused by the trickle of water from above.

"The first bend is near," said Saul, pointing briefly, and again they set out, Brentley breaking the way.

But the cliff, opposite which they presently stood, was absolutely void of any cheering sign. The westering sun struck upon its limestone front and gave it a sort of majestic beauty, but to Chavannes it was only a symbol of mercilessness; a silent enemy holding somewhere within its stony heart the girl he loved.

For another hour they went forward, each silent for the most part, because conversation was difficult in connection with their efforts; and because of the solemnity of their undertaking, they were not inclined to speech. It was Saul who called a halt.

"Let's go back," he said. It'll be near sun-

down when we get there, and I believe we are working the wrong side of the river."

"Why?"

"Because the cliffs we have been studying have uniformly presented an almost solid front. But we know there are crevices and caverns somewhere; therefore they must be on this side." The speaker continued as they faced about and began their return. "There are breaks in these walls, as you have noticed, and to-morrow morning we will make a crossing and spy out these above which we walk." He smiled at the slender, silent figure walking by his side with springy tread. "Don't feel discouraged, Gaston. We have barely begun, you know."

"It is the delay which makes the inward fret, although I know we're doing all we can."

"I feel that to-morrow will bring developments. To-night we must get all the rest possible."

They found the horses where they had left them, with the collie on guard. He arose at their approach and greeted them with signs of delight. The sun was swathed in crimson, fleecy clouds, and hung just above the horizon.

"This spot is high and dry. Why not camp here to-night?" queried Chavannes.

"We will. But the horses must have water. Let's ride back to the little stream we crossed a half-mile away and let them drink. I think there is some grass there, too, and they can eat a bite before nightfall."

Once more they were in the saddle, and during the brief trip no word was spoken. The beasts seemed grateful for the water, but when permission was given them to crop the wiry grass which grew in sickly fashion along the watercourse, they sniffed at it and held their heads up.

"Don't blame them!" muttered Saul. "That's

mighty poor provender when they're accustomed to bluegrass, corn and oats."

Upon their return they took a slightly different route, and chanced upon the very thing they had hoped for—an empty log cabin. Chavannes' keen eyes saw it first, a square bulk of gloom between the clustering trees.

"Look you, Saul! A habitation?"

"Let us hope it will prove such for us."

They pressed forward and soon dismounted in front of the lonely hut. Its plank door seemed shut tight, its clapboarded roof was twisted and bore patches of moss, the chinking of mud and stones had fallen partly out, and the log doorstep was nearly rotted away.

"There's no doubt it's deserted, *mon ami*," Saul remarked, his quick eyes taking in these evidences of neglect and decay. "The question now is if it is at all fit for occupancy. Let's investigate."

As they approached Gaston uttered a sudden exclamation, grasped Saul's arm and pointed downward.

"Hoof-prints, by the Lord!" Brentley's voice was tense. "They're fresh, too. Others have been here before us, and recently. . . . What do you make of it?"

But the Frenchman, in a stooping posture, was creeping toward the closed door. One of his hands was thrust in this velvet jacket at the waist. His gaze was bent upon the ground.

Saul drew his revolver and cautiously advanced. Roderick Dhu made no sign whatever, and from this fact his master believed no enemy was near.

Directly Gaston sank to one knee, and instantly Saul was peering over his shoulder.

"A human foot-print, and a big one!"

Chavannes arose.

"The Bearded Devil made it!"

"How do you know?"

"Intuition—perhaps. But you shall see."

"We're on the verge of success, comrade! Now let's have a look inside before the light fails."

But the door was locked. A quick circuit of the shack revealed one small window, which was also secured, and draped with some dark cloth within to obstruct the vision. When Saul, who had tarried at the window in the vain hope of forcing it, came around to the door again, it was to find the ready-minded Frenchman with his finger at the key-hole.

"Produce your key to the room at the inn, friend Saul," he said, calmly. "I have an idea."

"You certainly have a brain," and from his trousers pocket Brentley produced the ponderous piece of brass.

It entered easily, and at the second effort threw the bolt.

"Black as the bottomless pit!" Chavannes took one step forward as the door creakingly opened. "A lucifer, Saul. There must be something here for us to see."

Patiently they waited for the fuming, fizzing yellow nodule to turn to flame, but at last the wooden splinter caught and Brentley held aloft the tiny blaze. Little was revealed. The room had a rough floor of thick oak slabs; there was no furniture. Just across from them a huge black fireplace yawned, cold and ashless. As they turned their eyes here and there they discerned some formless outlines in a corner. The holder of the match hastily lit another, and the two bent to examine whatever might be piled there. It proved to be food. There was a whole ham,

cooked; two fowls, likewise ready to be eaten; a quantity of cornbread, and two vast stone jars, one holding milk and the other water. The burned-out match bit Saul's finger. He dropped it and they went outside, locking the door. Gaston's hand fell to Saul's shoulder.

"What do you make of it?"

"We've stumbled upon Mack Leek's storehouse. Here's where he caches his foodstuff until he is ready to convey it to Miss LaTour and her keeper."

"Exactly."

"Manifestly we cannot make his supply house our working base. We'd better go on back to the dry spot under the trees. It's just beyond that cedar thicket yonder."

"Isn't this discovery valuable?" asked Chavannes, as they mounted.

"Invaluable! my boy. It virtually places the key to the situation in our hands."

"And we can watch—and when he comes, follow?"

"Yes. . . . But the devil of it is he knows, or will know quickly, that we are here. Then, too, I dislike the fresh tracks we found. It may be he took them food this very afternoon, and you may be sure he provides enough each visit to last a week at least. We'll hold to our discovery as a possible way out, but in the meantime we've got to work. And in the morning we'd better move our camp a little farther away. If Leek were to discover our proximity to-day's find would go for naught."

The Frenchman said nothing. Ten minutes ago his hopes were zenith-high; it had seemed then that a few hours, at the most, would see the end of the quest. But before the matter-of-fact reasoning of his friend the vision faded—and the

drab, dreary commonplace rose up again. His heart weighed in his breast. With sagged shoulders and head hung forward he rode in silence until they came to the spot where they were to pass the night.

Here the horses were unsaddled and unbridled and secured by halter ropes. Two blankets and two pillows were a part of the equipment for each man sent out by Miss Mehitabel, and these were speedily unrolled.

"I don't think it cold enough for a fire, and it would be risky," observed Saul, sitting cross-legged and drawing out pipe and pouch. "A hundred puffs, and I turn in."

Gaston absently rolled a cigarette, gazing toward the east, where the sky held the faintest silver tinge. He lighted from the bowl of Saul's pipe, then they sat and smoked stolidly, like Indians. Chavannes finished first.

"Good night, and good luck to-morrow!" He flicked a dull red spark toward the river, and lying down, pulled a blanket over his shoulder.

"Fair dreams, comrade, and a blessing on our work," returned Brentley.

And soon thereafter, nicotine accentuating the slumber-call, he rolled up by the side of his new-found friend and was presently asleep. Roderick Dhu, crouched at ease nearer the horses, cast a slanting glance at the two swathed forms. All seeming well to his faithful mind, he gently dropped his head to his paws.

But all was not well.

Gaston's heart was flaming with love and hate and longing and anger. The longer he lay and thought of what might have been, and what was, the more intense his feelings became. She was near—very, very near! She must be! Perhaps within half a mile, perhaps less. Down beneath

the very ground upon which he lay might be the hidden grotto where she languished. The thought was intolerable. He could scarcely endure the white-hot pain it brought to his mind. For an hour or more he wrestled with himself, knowing that he was helpless as an infant, yet resenting this same helplessness with the dumb ferocity of a tiger. At last he cast the blanket from him and stood up. Saul was sleeping as though he lay in bed. The moonlight was very brilliant and lighted the surroundings mistily. Gaston all at once became aware that his lips were softly speaking the name of his lost one. Would she hear if he called, and would she answer? She must be close—within the hailing of his voice. But it would not do to waken Brentley. Noiselessly Chavannes moved away, going eastward. There was enough light for him to find his way without colliding with any of the numerous natural obstacles. When, as nearly as he could judge, a quarter of a mile had been covered, he began calling his sweetheart.

“Margot! Margot!”

Tenderly, beseechingly, he sent the cry out into the still night, into spaces which never before had heard that name brought from a foreign clime. “Margot! Margot!” Over and over, as he went forward, now stopping to listen for any faint returning hail, now struggling on to another point to call again: “Margot! Margot!”

And Margot heard and would have answered, as we have seen, but could not.

When, an hour or so before dawn, he came soft-footed back to his blanket, the yellow eye of the collie noted his approach, though the Frenchman did not know it.

XVI

Bidding the gentle reader back to the inn of The Leaning Stump, and setting down faithfully a most interesting dialogue between the master thereof and another, who was a saddler and preacher in one.

Cadwallader Hull leaned in the low doorway of his public and blinked lazily at the sinking sun. His round face bore a look of bovine placidness, and to further complete the comparison it might be stated that his jaw moved with a slow, rotary motion. Now and then a stream of fluid tobacco was emitted from his heavy, fleshy lips. After standing thus a long time the vacant expression, by imperceptible gradations, became one of gratification. Smoothing the white apron over his prodigious paunch, he spoke.

"I fair won out with the boys last night, Noey. You should 'a' been here an' saw their bills gape, like to crazy turkey-chicks in a shower. I've argyed an' argyed, but las' night I nailed the argyment down an' clinched it. I did, or I'm a common liar!"

The motley-clad, attenuated person thus addressed was lolling on the great stump which gave the inn its name, absently chewing an oat-straw which he had picked from the surface of the stump before occupying it.

"What sort of an argument, Master Hull? You know it's your favorite pastime when you can get some one to go against you."

"As to who's the best known man in these

parts. I've held as I was, bein' along in years an' a public man, but others have said Mr. This or Mr. That. But las' night, bless you, when they's all settin' 'roun' enjoyin' their rum an' stout, I brings up the subjec' a-purpose. An' when things 's gittin' warm I ups an' tells 'em 'bout the young stranger from way upstate, a-walkin' in this very door that very mornin' an' a-slappin' his brass on the bar an' callin' me Master Hull—same as he'd knowed me twenty year. That floored 'em!"

"I reckon," agreed Mr. Mole, and continued to chew his straw.

"I say I wish't you could 'a' seen it!" repeated Cadwallader Hull, sluing his barrel-like body around with an effort to stare at his unenthusiastic auditor.

"I foregathered at the Limping Dog last night," Noey deigned to explain.

Master Hull bridled.

"An' ain't my liquor whut it should be, that you go traipsin' off to little Manse Higbee's?"

"Your liquor sent me there, friend. Had I been sober I never would have pranced so far just for the pleasure of weaving back."

"Whut's for'ard at the post-house, parson, anyway? Any comin's an' goin's, an' any news?" Then, glancing up and down the road, across it and over his shoulder, he whispered behind his hand: "Any word o' the los' gal?"

Noey leisurely turned a red-veined eye at his interlocutor, and said, with half a leer:

"I'm sober—disgracefully sober. I mind myself of an overstuffed buzzard, moping on a limb. You want news? There can be no news when the brain is dull; or, should it come, its flavor would be lost. Fetch me, good Boniface, a heaping measure of my favorite beverage; serve it as I

sit; and within a half-score minutes my tongue will loose and run."

"You be welcome to the stout, but call me no names!" And Master Hull waddled within on his errand.

The preacher drank the liquor which was brought him in one big gulp, ran his tongue about his lips as though to secure the last taste possible, then smiled benignantly.

"When all's said and done, it's the best friend a man can have," he averred. "We have ample authority. Didst ever study Holy Writ, my corpulent friend?"

"It's of the news I want to hear. A man drinks or he don't an' that's all there is to that. You promised news."

"Did I? Within a half-score minutes, was it not? And it yet is scarcely one. But you are a good fellow if you do take all my coin, and I'll tell you. Two strangers came to the Limping Dog last night, each seeking lodging."

Master Hull thrust his puffy hands under his apron and hefted at his trousers' band. It was his characteristic anticipatory gesture.

"Together, men or women, old or young?"

"Men, young men, one at a time. The first rolled in with Deef Dick; a slim, white-faced, black-haired, dandified-looking fellow who seemed foreign. The other came later, with a stick and bundle and a dog at his heels nearly as big as Mordecai Fode's Paddyfoot. He was upstanding, this last one, husky as you'd find in a day's journey and with a smile like the daybreak."

"Him as come las' was tall, you say?"

"Aye."

"An' broad?"

"Aye."

"He wore a cap, did he?"

"A cap he wore, till he doffed it with royal grace to Mistress Moll and begged her in fair words for a bed in which to lie."

"'Tis my young gentleman, or I'm a common liar!" burst out Master Hull. "Him it was that knew me! He come to the store in a wag'n alongside o' Cap'n Pembroke's gal; him an' his big yaller-white dog, an' while the gal bartered he took his ale."

"It must be the same."

"But who be they, Noey man, an' whut their business?"

"The first one gave his name to Moll, and where he's from. The name I did not catch, but it had a French sound."

"And his home?"

Mr. Mole yawned and scratched his stubble-covered chin.

"D'you reckon you're safe with a secret, Master Hull?"

This was more than the fat tavern keeper could accept calmly. He waddled out to the stump, and half squatting before the figure perched upon it, with hands on knees, he retorted with some heat.

"D'ye take me fur a loose-tongued wench who blabs whut she hears the minute she can git a year to listen? I say, where was his home?"

"He said it was Philadelphia," returned Noey, carelessly.

"An' is *that* your precious secret!" snorted the other, getting erect with a sudden jerk.

"Your head should have been filled with brains instead of black mud, Sir Thickwit. Philadelphia is the home of the missing girl."

Now a pudgy finger flew up and lay beside a stubby nose, and Cadwallader opened his little eyes as wide as he could and pursed his fleshy lips in a whistle of surprise. After a moment:

"There'll be a stir comin'!" he declared, gravely important. "Mark me! It's her lover, Noey, an' lovers is hell when they git fair started!"

"I do believe you're waking up. But there's more yet."

Master Hull almost danced in his eagerness.

"Why, Noey, bless me! I'm glad you went to little Manse's. *He* didn't show up, did he?"

"If you mean Mack Leek—no. But the foreign-looking man fetched a trunk with him."

"To be sure. All gentlemen travel with trunks when they go in style."

"This was not so big, but 'twas bound with brass bands, close; not a hand's breadth apart."

"A likely trunk to the eye; I see it now."

"Deef Dick shouldered it in from the stage, for I saw it all, and when he let it to the floor it settled there like a millstone."

"Dick's a gi'nt, if he ain't over-big."

"And when the gentleman had gone upstairs and sent word back for his belongings, Moll told Manse to take the trunk up."

"Well!"

"When he laid hold of it he couldn't more than budge one end."

"Manse's had the ager, an' it's left him chigger-sucked like, an' measly."

"Then Moll railed out at me and ordered me to lend a hand, but I was far gone in my cups and laughed at her, and told her I had a rupture."

"Whut then, Noey?"

"Why, the other stranger came to the rescue, and between him and Manse they lugged the trunk away."

"That 'pears to be a long story 'bout nothin' more'n a trunk," opined Master Hull.

"Again I must deplore the fact that your head

is all solid instead of having within it the natural cavities and fillings. So I will explain. A ransom is demanded for the release of the abducted girl. The news is sent post-haste to Philadelphia, and in due time her lover arrives with a small trunk which it takes two men to carry upstairs. Is it plain now, or shall I borrow an auger from Hefty Will's shop yonder and bore into your noggin?"

Cadwallader threw wide his pudgy palms.

"Gold!" he hissed, his face shining with excitement and alarm. "D'ye mean to say that, Noey—that he's got the ransom with him?"

"So it seemed to my besodden intellect last evening, and I've had no cause to change my opinion to-day."

Master Hull edged up to the stump, and leaning his bulk upon it, whispered confidentially:

"How much did they want?"

"Who?"

"Them as took her."

"Why don't you say Mack Leek and his gang?"

"Hush, man! Hush! They'd burn me out an' beat me up! A man who's got his livin' to make must be careful of his words. How much, Noey?"

"I heard it was ten thousand dollars."

Cadwallader gasped audibly, and his fingers began to pluck as though at invisible coins.

"Gold! Gold!" he muttered. "Enough to buy a big slice o' this county. They ain't no gal wuth it!"

Noey Mole turned an unfathomable look upon him.

"I knew one once who was worth that to me, and more."

Master Hull grinned vacuously.

"That's liquor talkin' with your tongue. But you allus was a qu'r chap an' give to crazy say-

in's and doin's. . . . Ten thousan'! There never was a gal wuth half of it!"

The man on the stump forbore to pursue the argument. He sat with hugged knees updrawn toward his chin, his gaze going out to a rarely beautiful sunset. Whether it was some subtle influence from the dying day, whether the approaching twilight wrought deception, or whether some fugitive memory of twenty years before gave him a moment's grace—who can tell? But the habitual look of cynical, good-natured mockery had vanished, and in its place shone for a fleeting portion of time a yearning pathos. It lasted only a breath, this inner rebirth which was destined to instant death; then the lip curled again, one eyebrow arched, and with a sigh the saddler turned his head to where his companion was still standing babbling to himself of gold and girls.

"Hark ye, friend!" he said, "if you are a wise tavern keeper you'll hold this news between your teeth until the whole thing is settled."

"Trust me. I've a livin' to make. But never, since Washington whipped the British, have I heerd sich a yarn!"

"The whole countryside will be a-hum directly. It takes no Scripture prophet to foresee that. . . . But I grow dry, good Master Hull. Be gracious enough to fetch me another portion of liquid cheer, generous, like the first, and I'll ask you a question in payment therefor."

Cadwallader spread his hands on either side of his bulging front, and ceasing his monologue, gazed with head aside at the figure which sat and eyed him knowingly, while something between a smile and a leer made his mouth grotesque.

"Is there more to foller?" he demanded, suspiciously; "or are you tryin' to beat me out o'

my good stout? If you bain't a rogue, Noey, then rogues is all hung!"

"A question for one good swallow," was the imperturable reply. "And hurry, for my throat bakes while you stand there like an oaf."

"An' it be only a joke, I'll cuff you, Noey!" warned the tavern keeper, and forthwith waddled within shaking his round head on his fat neck.

He reappeared quickly, for he was consumed with curiosity, bearing a mug which he had refilled.

"Here it is. An' be you foolin'—watch out!"

Mr. Mole took the mug and drained it as eagerly as though it held ambrosia.

"A thousand thanks, kind sir! 'Tis sweet to sit thus enthroned and have a cup-bearer bring your liquor to your knee! The draft was excellent, but don't chalk it up, for I pay for it forthwith. Answer me, Master Hull; hast seen the beldame known as Sis Tomperby within the last ten days?"

But instead of making reply, Master Hull swelled up like a toad and began to sputter.

"An' is *that* the coin you would pay me in, you wastrel? It is a cheat you are. An' I'll chalk it heavy—aye, an' make you pay, too, a-cozenin' me out o' my hard-bought stout wi' sich fool talk! . . . Have I saw Sis Tomperby!"

And in his rage he spat on the ground and drove one fist into his other palm.

Noey Mole chuckled, and wriggled himself into a more comfortable attitude.

"I've already proven you a witless loon, Master Hull, and I'll restrain my anger now, as becomes a wise man. But if you would learn more, answer my question. Have you seen the beldame?"

"Nay! For aught I know or keer the buzzards might 'a' picked her filthy bones!"

"Hast ever heard how, last winter, when rheumatism gripped her and laid her bedfast, Mack Leek took her food and fuel?"

"Nay," sullenly, "'twas none o' my affair. I 'tend my business."

"Such was the story which was told around. Well, Sis Tomperby has disappeared. For ten days or such a matter not a soul has laid eyes on her."

"Tame news fur a mug o' good liquor!" protested Cadwallader. "The bargain won't hold."

"'Twill surely hold, Milord Numbskull. How long has it been since Deef Dick lost his lady passenger and threw the community in an uproar thereby?"

Master Hull scratched his pate and looked at the sky.

"You be a main fine man to talk aroun' a subjec', Noey," he returned perplexedly. "I'd say, by an' large, that Deef Dick los' the gal a matter o' ten or 'leven days ago."

"And what did Mack Leek and his gang do with her?"

The cautious Cadwallader jumped as though a pistol had gone off in his face, and hastily surveyed the perspective in every direction, turning completely around for this purpose.

"Don't talk so reckless like, man!" he urged. "How should I know who snatched 'er, an' whur she might be?"

"Then I'll tell you about it. Mack took her from the coach and is holding her for ransom. Where she is hidden I cannot say, but with her and watching her is Sis Tomperby."

"Man! You run news like a sugar maple runs sap! You should 'a' stuck to preachin'! Now

I might live to the crack o' doom an' never learn so much. But it's none o' my business," shaking his head. "I'm a frien' to all, as becomes a man who serves the public."

Mr. Mole made no reply, and presently, through the silence, came the clickety-clack of hoofs on the Cedarton road.

"Now who can be a-ridin' so fast from yon way?" wondered Master Hull, aloud. "A man would think the dev'l drives, or else a doctor was wanted main quick."

He took several side steps to get an uninterrupted view, and shading his eyes with one hand, stood at gaze, straddle-legged. Across the little bridge in the hollow below the galloping feet thundered, then Cadwallader exploded.

"It's him, by all the saints! An' Georgey Snipper lopes at his heels same's a little dog after a big 'n'. You want 'o talk keerful like, Noey, an' he pulls up."

Mr. Mole paid heed neither to this admonition nor the swiftly approaching riders. His face was turned to the west, and he was again employed with his half-chewed straw.

The galloping twain indeed stopped, within a half-score feet of the tavern door. Leek drew his big horse to its haunches with an oath and glared at the pair before him. Mine host cringed visibly before such evident might, and began to rub his swollen hands one over the other. Noey Mole's eyes had never left the salmon-barred sky just above the horizon, over which hung a dun canopy which was beginning to be pricked here and there with pinholes of white light. Perhaps he was dreaming.

"A glass of something, sir, is it?"

Meekly, and cloyed with rankest servility, the

innkeeper's voice arose. He made an attempt at an awkward bow as he spoke.

"No!" stormed Mack Leek, curling his long thick beard around one hand. "Keep your stuff for the pigs you slop—such as that!"

Piqued that the saddler had paid no more heed to his arrival than he would have given the chance passing of a stray dog, the bandit flung one arm out toward Noey as he spoke the last words.

The man on the stump slowly turned his head and regarded quietly the towering figure on the horse.

"You are free with your compliments this evening," he said, coolly.

"When your betters pass, sot, you ought o' greet 'em properly. It makes me mad to see a common drunkard think he's better than anybody else."

"If you refer to me, you damned outlaw, I fling your words back in your face! And as for drinking, I do not hold it as great a sin as either murder, theft or abduction!"

The preacher's posture hardly changed as he made this speech. But at its very beginning a long-barrelled pistol appeared in his hand from some source unknown, and he kept it levelled at Mack Leek's breast as he delivered his invective.

Poor Master Hull was on the verge of a seizure. He thrust his short arms over his head and shook his pudgy hands in the air, walking hither and there, groaning and muttering.

The bearded bully seemed paralyzed with amazement. His jaw fell, and his countenance assumed a frozen stare.

"Did I speak loudly enough?" politely inquired the ragged object on the stump.

Mack Leek came to himself with a kind of heaving shudder.

"You beggar! You blackguard!" he roared, shaking his fist and rising in his stirrups in his wrath. "I'll have your miserable, worthless blood for this! Me! A gentleman an' a trader an' trainer o' hosses, to be accused by such a varlet as you o' high crimes! Master Hull's the witness, an' Georgey Snipper here's the witness! I'll get you—you rum-soaked rapscaillon!"

A sort of tired smile twisted the face of the man against whom he railed.

"You may get me, and you may be gotten first," he answered, evenly. "And while witnesses are being called, I'll summon you two now to testify that you began this dispute by wantonly heaping abuse upon me."

"I say I'll get you, an' I keep my word!"

"No doubt you'll try, but if I'm a reader of signs you'll have graver matters than simply getting me before many suns come up—probably before another one rises!"

"What do you mean?"

Leek urged his horse forward a pace and bent from his saddle.

Noey Mole laughed in his face.

"I mean your reign of outlawry is about over in this county. You went one too far when you took the young lady."

With a curse Leek raised his heavy riding whip to strike the weak form which dared thus to bait him, but the pistol was pointing at his ribs and a forefinger had curved around the trigger.

"Go slow, big man! I don't want to have to do it. There're others who are itching for the job, and I'm willing. Thank me for my candid warning now, and be on your way. I have heard Tennessee was a likely land, and if you are thinking of leaving Kentucky soon you might try it."

Infuriated, but helpless, the outlaw wheeled his

horse and faced Master Hull, who leaned, quaking visibly, against the corner of his inn.

"Hark ye, Cad!" he cried. "Did you see Jonathan Pembroke pass an' repass your door this mornin'?"

Now fear had so taken hold of Master Hull that his tongue worked poorly, but after two efforts he spoke.

"I never saw him pass, Mr. Leek, but he mus' 'a' done it, for I saw him a-comin' back. P'raps I 's busy with custom—"

"What time?"

"I go by my belly, havin' no watch. I should say it's nigh onto dinner time o' day."

"Hossback or on wheels?"

"'Twas a spring wag'n he druv."

"What's in it?"

"I'm not a pryin' man, Mr. Leek, holdin' ever' man's business to be his own, but it did 'pear to me he's loaded with a chist 'r somethin'."

"A trunk, say. Was't not a trunk?"

"Now a trunk it might 'a' been. I was here, in the door, an' he passed yon, t'other side the middle o' the road. There's a fair chance 'twas a trunk he's loaded with."

For a moment Mack Leek sat in silence, twisting his whiskers into a rope. Then, without a word of farewell or thanks, he started at a gallop for the ferry, his sallow-faced retainer following.

"You're a lost man, Noey!" burst from Master Hull's trembling lips.

The saddler-preacher stretched his thin arms and yawned.

"Hefty Will's working late to-day," he observed, glancing down the road to where a gleam from the smith's forge pierced the dusk.

XVII

Beginning in much mental and bodily stress for two young gentlemen of the tale, embracing a period of glory unalloyed, and culminating in a billet-doux of much import which came near to being forgotten.

Nine o'clock the next day found our adventurers sorely worn and apparently far from success as ever.

Brentley had wakened first, but Chavannes responded instantly to the touch upon his shoulder. They found a break in the cliffs soon after breakfast, a spot where a stream joined the river, and a flat-bottomed, stub-nosed boat of crudest manufacture was moored near the mouth of the creek. Whose this boat was they did not stop to inquire, but hailed it as a godsend, for without it the passage of the river would have proved an almost insuperable obstacle. It was too cold to swim, and so swift that they feared to trust their horses to it. The boat was a clumsy affair, leaked a little, and was propelled by rough-hewn paddles, but the friends pounced upon it with eagerness and essayed a crossing. Saul was a skilled boatman, and it was lucky indeed for them that this was so. Under less dextrous management the crazy craft would have turned bottom up more than once as they laboriously urged it across the rushing water. As it was, they were carried down almost a mile before they could win the other side. At last they made a landing at a spot similar to the one from which they had embarked,

muscle sore and blown from constant exertion, They found themselves in a stupendous ravine, with almost perpendicular sides which were ribbed massively by vast ledges of stone mantled with mosses and lichens. Vegetation was profuse, both in the narrow valley through which the brooklet came tumbling and sparkling, and the gigantic, upheaved sides. After a quarter of an hour's rest the friends breasted the ascent. It was easier than they had supposed, on account of the prevalence of saplings and low bushes which they could grasp to draw themselves upward. Once on the summit of the cliff again their progress was much easier. For an hour or more they pressed on, scanning with ceaseless vigilance the opposite wall of stone, and at last, on a kind of jutting headland, they came to a halt as though by mutual consent. Their faces were grave and they were breathing hard.

"This is a cruel country—your Kentucky," said Chavannes; "grand, but cruel."

Saul turned to him with a sympathetic smile.

"That is because she hides from you the dearest thing your heart holds," he replied. "But do not blame her, sweet friend. It is man's inhumanity you must deplore, and not kind Nature's animosity. And are there not robbers in far-off Normandy?"

Gaston gave a characteristic little gesture, and his lips relaxed. He thrust his hand out toward the silent wilderness.

"So merciless! So eternal! It seems a type of everlasting!"

"It is. What you see *has been* for millions of years, and will be millions more. . . . How are you standing the search?"

"I am of steel. You shall grow weary first."

"If I do, you will not know it. . . . Come,

there is a far sweep here. Let's look carefully and well."

They walked out to the very brow of the headland, and gazed long and silently across the deep gulf. Saul's conjecture of the day before was correct. The northern cliff showed openings far in excess of the southern one. In places they ran unbroken for rods and rods, parallel with the strata. These lateral crevices predominated largely, being more natural than the others. But frequently vertical openings showed also, these in the main being narrow slits of no great length, offering no possible cause for investigation.

For perhaps ten minutes the men stood silently looking, then Gaston's voice quietly arose.

"Yonder, Saul; away off. See where the wall curves sharply?"

He pointed as he spoke.

Brentley came to his back and looked over his shoulder.

"Yes, I see. It's the most abrupt bend we've yet sighted."

"Is there anything of interest revealed?"

Still the Frenchman's voice was low, and politely inquisitive.

Saul drew his brows down and cupped his hands about his eyes in concentration of vision.

"There is a possible vertical slit just at the sharpest part of the bend. That's all."

"Is there nothing below the opening? Something that moves?"

Again Saul strained his gaze up the river, only to at last shake his head.

"You must have eyes like a gerfalcon, friend Gaston. I see nothing. What is it?"

Chavannes turned with radiant face and clapped his hands on his friend's shoulders.

"I believe that we have found her!" he cried. Saul stared wonder and skepticism.

"Has the strain gone to your brain, *mon garçon*, that you talk so wildly? There is nothing, nothing to build such a hope upon. A possible crevice, and even that is too far distant for certainty. Be reasonable, until we can know."

"The eyes of love see far, my comrade." Chavannes' sensitive lips were tender and his tones were musical with a new emotion, or rather an old emotion quickened. "I feel that she is yonder; I know it! And my heart is singing!"

Brentley took the slim white hands from his shoulders and gripped them hard.

"I have read of such things. Some call it intuition, but it is more of an undiscovered sense. You must indeed love this Margot."

"I worship her!" was the low, simple reply, and the speaker bowed his head as though holiness were near.

Saul put his arm around the other's shoulders and turned him about.

"What did you mean about something moving on the stone?"

"I do not see it now." The words were half evasive. "Perhaps my eager eyes imagined it. I seemed to catch an elusive flash of color, that was all. . . . Let us go," he added, and for the first time since they had met Saul saw his friend's pale cheeks touched with a fleeting red shadow.

"Yes, let us go," he repeated. "We cannot travel too swiftly."

At this point of their journey the configuration of the land was such that it was with the greatest difficulty they made progress near the cliff-edge, where they could keep the other side in view. They accordingly fell back for some distance at Saul's suggestion, and his assurance that he

would know when they had gone far enough to again draw near the river. This arrangement suited Gaston poorly at first, for he wanted his goal constantly before him, but realizing presently that it made for greater speed he acquiesced graciously. Every few moments Gaston would inquire if they had not better draw in, but Saul would only shake his head and hold grimly on. It seemed to the eager Frenchman that they had walked miles before his friend stopped and pointed up a slight acclivity toward the dry bole of a dead oak.

"I marked that tree before we started," he said; "and it is very near the spot we are seeking."

Chavannes dashed forward without reply, and it was well that Brentley came hard on his heels, as the hot-blooded fellow might have wrought ruin to their plans. As it was, Saul saw him stop as suddenly as though a bullet had struck him, toss up one arm and throw back his head as though to shout. Brentley got his hand over the rash mouth just in time, for he, too, saw that which had paralyzed the hurrying feet of his friend, then his strong arms were forcing the half-crazed man down into the undergrowth.

"Quiet! For God's sake, quiet!" he hissed. "A word will betray us! Lie still, and keep hidden! Remember the crone who guards her, who is doubtless bound body and soul to Mack Leek! Stop trembling so, man; you shake the bushes!"

Chavannes, crouching with hungry eyes staring straight across the chasm to whose verge they had come, was indeed trembling violently from the force of his emotions. At Saul's urgent words he reached out and got his hand, closing upon it with an unconscious force which made the larger man wince and bite his tongue to keep down

an exclamation. And the twitching lips of the lover murmured constantly:

"We've found her! found her! God be praised! She is there—there! She could hear me if I called! But to see her sweet face imprisoned thus so harshly would madden me. Oh, rejoice with me, comrade, that the quest is over! And you, sweet friend, who have done it all, shall dwell in my heart forever along with Margot. Margot, my beloved!"

"Lower yet!" warned Saul, stretched at full length. "Your head can be seen. We must be crafty as Indians. Lie out, this way, with your chin on your hand. Then we can look and talk in safety. We have just begun, you know."

Gaston automatically assumed the attitude which Brentley had taken, and there, side by side, parting with their fingers the glossy leaves of a dwarfed rhododendron, they gazed upon the hiding-place of Margot LaTour.

There could be no doubt that they had located her prison. Directly across from them the titanic stone wall curved like the segment of a circle. Almost in the exact center of this curve, about twenty feet from the top, an uneven vertical fissure showed. It was narrow, the opening apparently never reaching twelve inches in width, and extending for something like eight or ten feet. The presence of this fissure alone could not have brought the positive conviction that she whom they sought was back of it. But, fluttering in the morning breeze which swept down the canyon, was a cloth of bright crimson. It was fastened in some unseen way to the bottom-most part of the crevice, and would have been invisible to anyone within. It presented a startling spectacle in the midst of those untenanted solitudes, silently waving its bright appeal. For several minutes

no word was spoken by the adventurers. It was Saul who said:

"What do you make of it? It was that you saw on the headland back yonder."

"Yes, I saw it flash once."

Chavannes spoke as in a dream.

"It is an expression of your Margot's wit," continued the other. "Doubtless that is a portion of her apparel which she managed to secure in this manner while her guard was asleep. It can be seen far, and shows she has not given up."

"She would never give up, brave girl!" murmured Chavannes.

"How glad I shall be to know her. Have you a plan?"

"A plan?"

"Yes, for her release."

"My poor head is all awlirl as yet."

"'Twill take hard thinking."

"Yes; hard thinking."

"There is but one possible method, and that is to find the way by which she was taken there."

"We must find it."

"Gaston?"

"My sweet friend."

"It draws near to eleven, and at noon we are to meet Uncle Bacchus at the place of parting yesterday."

"How can I leave this spot!"

"We can return, but that will not be necessary. Our business from now on must be on the other side."

Silence for a little while. Brentley turned to his friend, whose concentrated gaze had never once left the magnet which drew it—a gaze which reflected intensest yearning.

"Almost within arm's length!" he heard the tense lips mutter.

"We should be going, dear fellow," continued Saul. "I rejoice with you at our success thus far, but there is work ahead."

"Yes—yes, you are right. But when I turn from yonder cleft the sun will leave the sky! Tell me. How far is that prison place from where our horses are?"

"It must be two miles, or nearly so."

"Then are we not wrong in supposing the cabin to be the Bearded Devil's storehouse?"

"I don't know." Saul's voice was perplexed. "It may have been the nearest available shelter, and two miles' transportation on horseback is a small matter."

Chavannes pointed across the river with one long forefinger.

"Have you located it well? I am relying upon you entirely, for you are at home, and I in a strange land. Can we come to it, by night or by day, and stand at any time above her prison, and know that we are there?"

"Surely we can. There is no other bend of such magnitude and abruptness between here and the spot from which we started. And our dead oak tree—it is just opposite that."

"Ah, it is well there is one sane man at work! Simple and sure as your reasons are, I never would have thought of them. My mind is filled to bursting with Margot only, and I have no room there for anything else. It is almost as though a fever had gripped my brain. But you are calmer in your love, and mayhap do not understand this. 'Tis something born in sunny France."

The young lover's chest heaved under his lace-frilled shirt.

"Guide and help me," he went on. "You are the thinker, the planner, but when the time comes

for action I will be by your side. And one time, remember, I am to be alone."

He choked back something in his throat, and for an instant his usually placid face was fierce.

Brentley answered:

"I will go as far for you as I would for myself, and don't forget I am fighting for my Dorothy as well as for you. Gaston! Had she not relented at the last moment I don't know how I would have fared upon this quest. My heart would have been lead and my brain lifeless. For I love this honey-haired maid just as much as you do your little captive ma'm'selle, and were she where luckless Margot is I doubt not my plight would be fully equal to yours—But look, for God's sake! And be quiet!"

For the first time since the momentous discovery, Chavannes had allowed his eyes to seek his companion's in a grateful glance. And that moment Saul saw, and spoke before he could hold his tongue.

A figure had come to the opening in the cliff wall. It was standing somewhat back, where the light did not penetrate fully, but indistinct as it was to Brentley, the eagle eyes of Chavannes recognized his sweetheart. When Saul uttered his almost involuntary exclamation he had flung his arms out mechanically across the back of the man at his side, and now he felt the form stiffening beneath his touch.

"It is she! It is she!"

The words came in a sibilant undertone, and the speaker made as though to crawl forward.

"Lie still, man! Are you mad? For heaven's sake control yourself!"

But Chavannes only answered: "It is she! It is she!" truly like one demented.

Then, as they both lay and watched, Saul's arm

tight around the wiry body which he pressed to his side with restraining force, the dim figure came slowly forward. Before it reached the jagged sides which presently framed it, Saul knew that it was Margot LaTour. The girl walked quite up to the opening, then throwing her arms up she grasped the rock on each side with her hands, thrust her face clear out into the air and sunshine. The wind at once caught her unbound hair and ravelled it out in countless threads, whipping some strands under her chin and drawing others across her forehead. Such a picture in such a setting doubtless was never presented before in all history. Saul knew that his lips were parted and his breath bated, and vaguely he felt the quick, jerky respirations which shook the body under his arm. The girl could be seen plainly, for the gorge was not wide, and the air clear. They could even notice her squinting her eyes against the brilliant sunlight which fell full in her face, and a gold breast-pin glinted at the base of her milky neck.

A sudden rigor shook Gaston, then he squirmed about in the bear-hug his friend still maintained, and whispered:

"My mind is clear now, Saul; clear and bright as this day. When her blessed presence was revealed, calm came to me. Now take your arm from me—I am going to show myself!"

"You will spoil—"

"Listen! You have been wise and good, and I shall never cease to remember. But Margot fills the opening, and the old dame is doubtless busy at something within. Think what it will mean to my beloved to know that I am here—that we are here—and have found her! Think of the joy which will fill her, and of the easement from apprehension which such knowledge will

bestow. And no possible harm can come. Do you not see?"

"She may scream, or call your name."

"Her little head is too wise for that. The success of this adventure means everything to me. I am willing to take the risk."

Brentley slowly drew his arm away.

"Much that you say is right. The only danger is in the old woman seeing you, or the girl crying out. Rise quickly, then, and go forward a few steps. She may disappear any moment."

With a choked exclamation Chavannes got on his feet and swiftly passed around the concealing bush. Then some thorny creepers and a few trees alone intervened. Regardless of the spikes which tore at his trousers, he pushed forward and presently stood fully exposed. Saul had crept after Gaston, and now crouched behind him.

"Don't say a word, boy! Wait till she looks!"

For Margot had all at once let her chin fall, as though in meditation. Would she go back into the cavern without looking up again? The thought darted to Chavannes' brain like the entering of a knife-point, and he leaned forward, striving with all his will to make her feel his presence. Several tense moments passed. Then the girl's arms dropped listlessly to her sides. Standing thus dejectedly for a time, she took one slow backward step, her face still downcast. It was more than the ardent Gaston could endure. He had filled his lungs for the hail which he felt he must give, when Margot threw up her head, as though she had truly heard his voice. Straight across at her lithe young lover she looked, while he silently held his arms toward her in dumb affection and assurance.

Saul, resting with his hip on his heel, saw the girl stand as if petrified for three full breaths.

Then she came forward until her form again filled the opening, and smiled bravely over the gulf. Two fingers flew to her lips in the silence sign, then presently with the same fingers she wafted a kiss toward her knight. An expression of alarm followed almost instantly, and she waved the watcher back with short but vehement gestures.

"Back to cover—hurry!" urged Brentley, as his friend, loath to leave, yet tarried.

He grasped the leg of the man standing as he spoke, and forcibly drew him down again.

"All lovers are fools," commented Saul, as they sank behind the rhododendron bush again, "but I believe a French lover is the foolishlest fool on earth—if you will pardon me. . . . Now see what you barely escaped!"

The orifice was obstructed again, but by another figure. An old, hag-like woman stood there now, her unkempt gray locks writhing snakily about her head. One hand was held above her eyes, and she was peering up and down the river, and over to the place where the young men lay securely hidden. She saw nothing, not even the scarlet signal which flapped against the wall below her feet, and presently withdrew.

"We'll have to hurry to keep our appointment," spoke the cooler head. "Bend low until we are down this little hillock; then we may be as careless as we please."

Saul at once began to retreat, and Gaston, with a last lingering glance, sighed and reluctantly followed.

So elated were they that they linked arms as they hurried along, like schoolgirls.

"A good morning's work, my boy. Could you hope or ask for more within half a day?"

"I can never repay you, my comrade. Without you and your resource and courage my Margot

would have been lost. Remember, they sought for her before you came."

"But they did not get a message in the night as they drifted asleep in a boat." Saul spoke half chaffingly. "Had I not been given a clue I would have been as helpless as any of these people. I was just lucky, and I am glad."

Gaston turned a serious face up to the smiling one at his side.

"Do you not think her fair?" he asked, suddenly.

"Fair indeed. But she seems frail as a flower."

"'Tis the imprisonment, and worry, and loss of sleep—poor girl! You should see her free in the sunshine, when love surrounds her life! A flower? Yes; and her very being is a perfume. . . . Let's hasten; we're moving so slowly."

"We'll catch Uncle Bacchus, don't fear. And our legs could go no faster unless we ran."

"It was not of the black man I thought, but of beginning afresh the work of rescue. Oh, Saul! I feel that I cannot rest until she's free!"

"All of our efforts shall be in that direction now. We should accomplish her release very soon."

Though he spoke thus encouragingly, doubt sat heavy on Saul's heart. He knew it would be no May-day frolic to find the entrance to that place of confinement.

The way grew more difficult, and they continued without speaking until they came to the abrupt declivity which gave into the ravine where they had left the boat. It took but a few minutes to go down, and soon they were ready for a second crossing.

"I believe we'll miss the old nigger sure if he's on time," declared Saul, ruefully. "We've less

than thirty minutes now to keep our appointment." He put his watch back with a vexed gesture.

"But is not our discovery worth a broken engagement?" queried Chavannes, wonderingly.

"Certainly; it is not that. But you don't know our black people. If the old fool would have sense enough only to wait a while. But he won't. You know his opinion of this country. Well, failing to sight either of us upon his arrival, he will turn and run for home as fast as his horse can go, and in all likelihood will tell Captain Pembroke and his family that we are dead. . . . But let me think. . . . We will be swept down stream again, as we were coming over, and will again have to trust more or less to luck for a landing. It may be one mile and it may be two before we get ashore. Then we must try to find the road by which we came yesterday afternoon in time to head off that old coward. Let's put off. We've no time to lose."

Ten seconds later they were afloat again. It took perhaps twenty minutes to conquer the current, and they had come to a point where the cliffs temporarily broke away into straggling hills before they could effect a landing.

"Where are we, friend?"

Gaston gazed about him almost in dismay. In spite of the cheering sunshine it seemed to him that they were in the midst of a country of which the devil had had a hand in the making.

"Goodness knows, I don't. But north is there, and somewhere in that direction is the road. It is nearly noon."

"Forward, then, and don't spare effort for me."

A half hour of dumb, toilsome progress brought them to a highway.

"Is this the road?"

Saul, chest heaving, turned in surprise toward the man whose breath was not even quickened.

"I believe so. . . . Are you made of iron?"

A smile dawned and faded on Gaston's face in a twinkling.

"Steel, I believe," he answered. . . . "See, a horseman!"

Brentley wheeled toward the east.

"It's he. We're in the nick of time. He's coming as though Satan and a picked band were at his heels."

A waved cap and a loud yell caused the approaching rider to draw rein. It was indeed Captain Pembroke's body-servant. Agitation was visible in every movement he made, and fright was depicted on his livid face, now almost the color of wood ashes.

"Fo' de Lawd Gawd's sake! Praise 'is name!" was the greeting the friends received, as the darky's eyes rolled devoutly skyward.

"Where are you going so fast, Uncle Bacchus?" asked Saul, his hand on the horse's neck.

"Me? . . . I's gwi lickety-split home; dat's 'bout whur I's gwi!"

"You promised to meet us at noon—the middle of the day."

"En ain't I been a-settin' dah whur I lef' you gem'n yistiddy fo' de pas' hour en mo'? Whur you been at, young marse? 'Fo' de Lawd, I thought dey'd done got you, en I gits lonesomer en lonesomer, en di'rec'ly some'n' squalls lak, back todes dem cliffs, en hit skeerd dis hoss so dey's no holdin' uv 'im. I wras'le wid 'im en saw he mouf, but no suh! He heerd dat squall lak en he's goin' home, en I stuck to 'im!"

This recital was totally unintelligible to Chavannes, and Brentley knew too well that native

ingenuity had invented the alarm and frightened horse. He knew, too, that it would be useless to uncover the barely hidden artifice, so he accepted the explanation at its face value and said:

"We have been on the other side, went a little farther than we intended, so were a few minutes late. Let us have what you've got to eat, and when you come to-morrow bring corn for the horses. There's nothing here for them to eat except leaves."

Uncle Bacchus lifted a canvas sack which he had balanced across his mount behind the saddle, and gave it to Saul.

"I's to quiah 'bout how you's git'n' 'long, en' 'specially to ax ef you hadn't foun' nothin'."

Brentley looked at the speaker keenly.

"Was that all? No note or letter for me?"

Now Uncle Bacchus displayed the few teeth he had in a grin of recollection.

"'Pon my soul en body! I's 'bout to furgit dat, sho! 'Kase de young missus she call me 'roun' to de side po'ch jes's I's git'n' ready to put out, en she gib me dis."

He removed his battered hat as he spoke, and took from the top of his flat head a long, narrow envelope.

"Dis am hit, suh, en she said it wuz fo' Marse Saul, I do b'lieb!"

"I'm Marse Saul"—taking the billet—"and if you'd gone home without giving this to me I'd have killed you as soon as I found it out."

This was said with such evident earnestness that the old negro's face fell. But he did not answer, and Brentley, hastily tearing the end from the envelope, read the message—

"Oh, Saul, Mack Leek was here this morning. He talked to papa out in the yard under

the big sugar tree. I saw the meeting from the window of my room, upstairs. This is the first time he was ever near our house. Both of them grew angry. I believe it was about poor dear Margot, and maybe about the gold, which is here safe in a closet in my room. The conversation didn't last long, but I think it ended with papa's ordering that awful man away. He is so big and wicked looking. When he had gone I asked papa what he had come for, but received no satisfactory answer. But I noticed that within a few minutes after Mack Leek left papa was getting all the firearms about the place together and having them oiled and loaded. I'm afraid something is going to happen. We have ten men slaves and a few boys almost grown, and some of them are very brave. It seems to me that papa is preparing for an attack of some sort. How I wish you were here—but no, no! I didn't mean that, of course. Don't come—don't dare come! I was just thinking how secure I should feel. Stay where you are and find our darling Margot—and *then* come fast as you can to
Your Dorothy."

Silently handing the open letter to Gaston, Saul drew a note-book and pencil from an inner pocket, and using the glossy neck of the horse by which he stood as a support, quickly traced a reply.

"Sweet lady of my heart, we found your Margot this morning, not over an hour ago. We permitted her to see us, so she knows that help is at hand. To release her is our problem, but this we hope to accomplish soon. Your written words are to my spirit what sunshine is to verdure. All that is within me

urges me to your side, but I believe you have full protection and I do not think that Mack will attempt any violence, soulless wretch that he is. He probably knows the gold has been transferred to your home, and is asking ransom. Be brave and careful. Do not venture out alone, and if you have a light revolver keep it always near. Gaston joins me in warmest messages to your family, but I alone send love eternal as eternity.

"Should real danger threaten, send Uncle Bacchus on your fastest horse."

Saul.

This letter he folded, placed in the envelope which had contained his, and handed to the darky.

"Look 'o' here, old man!" he said, drawing his brows down and making his voice stern. "Deliver that to Miss Dorothy the minute you get home, and don't forget it and don't lose it. And listen! It may be she'll start you back here at once, and day or night, *you come!* If you fail her I'll stick a spike through you and roast you over a slow fire. If you're faithful, I'll give you another piece like this." He slipped a golden half-eagle into the astounded servitor's hand. "Now gallop! The sooner you're home, the better."

Too amazed at this strange talk to even thank the giver of the yellow coin, or to render any effusive assurances of faithfulness, Uncle Bacchus gathered up his reins and sped away, a mystified mortal.

Saul turned to his friend.

"What do you think of Dorothy's note?"

"It spells mischief, my Saul. Maybe you had better return."

"With you and Margot—yes. Let's on.

There's a full afternoon ahead, and much can be done in a few hours, as we've shown this morning."

There was a trace of moisture in Chavannes' eyes.

"You wonderful friend!" he said.

XVIII

Sitting beside still waters with two human derelicts.

Mordecai Fode sat upon a bench by the door of his hut in Beechum's Woods. It was about two hours past noon on the day following Mack Leek's spectacular appearance at the public kept by Cadwallader Hull. The skins-and-leather man was busily engaged in finishing an axe helve, and he sang gently at his task a song which no one could possibly interpret in written notes. The stick of wood upon which he was engaged glistened grayish-white. It was hickory, and after drawing knife had come broken glass, and following that an oiled rag, for the philosopher was a painstaking and careful workman. He received two bits for every helve, and he never made more than two a day.

His hut was a hut; it did not approach the dignity of a cabin. He had built it many years before, all by himself, declining with his peculiarly sweet smile offers of help from kindhearted neighborhood folk. It could easily be seen that his mind had a twist in it, and people were sorry for him, and wondered who he was and where he had come from, and why Fate had dealt thus with him, who surely was innocent as a child. But he made no revelations, and about him hung an atmosphere which checked inquisitive tongues. His needs were few, and he supplied them by plying his queer trade—twisted rawhide for whips, and beautifully finished helves of season-

ed hickory for axes and hatchets. The hut was of one room, low. It was made of undressed logs covered with clapboards, and had a squat chimney of stone. There were two tiny windows.

Beechum's Woods comprised a considerable stretch of forest, and Mordecai Fode's home had been built in a small glade deep within its sylvan heart. Here was a natural opening of perhaps a quarter of an acre, even free from rank underbrush. The scattered bushes Mordecai had carefully uprooted, and the spot had grown grassy with the passage of the years. The isolated hut sat upon a very gradual slope which terminated at a brooklet; a babbling little forest stream which was forever musical with silver gurglings. And the inhabitant of this Arcadian nook had flower patches distributed about the purlieu with an eye to symmetry and the blending of proper colors. An ivy vine draped the chimney's barren grayness.

Mordecai Fode had no visitors. The spot where he dwelt was out of the way, no road led to it, and the idea had spread abroad somehow that he preferred to live alone. A natural idea in view of the place where he had chosen to build. Now and again in squirrel season a hunter would stumble upon the recluse's abode, but that was all.

This afternoon he sat and sang his cranky-sounding little tune which no written-down notes could ever capture, stopping now and again to eye critically the work in hand. The handle must be straight and true from tip to tip, and the grip turned just so. For his helves were in demand the length and breadth of the county, and never had one been thrown back on him because of faulty workmanship. Presently, as he sang and toiled, he saw a figure approaching between the great beeches which grew profusely in the vicinity

of his home. The philosopher continued to rub the shining wood, although in all probability this was the first human who had sought him thus in years.

The man came on, ducking agilely under a low hanging beech limb at the edge of the glade, then giving a hop-skip-and-jump which landed him squarely before the unperturbed workman.

"Friend, of a truth you hide well!" exclaimed the newcomer, ruefully bending to rub his bony and poorly protected shins. "For a half hour, or three quarters, maybe, I've been floundering through this wilderness, and what with running briars and stubborn bushes, I've sworn oaths I never knew existed. . . . Now bid me welcome, and show me where to sit!"

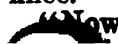
As Mordecai lifted his mild blue eyes a faint twinkle crept into them, but the dancing light was instantly eclipsed, and he replied in a gravely courteous voice.

"Welcome you are indeed, Noey Mole, though it's many a year you've taken to come. As for a place to sit, this bench is too small——"

Rising with the sentence unfinished he stooped and passed within the low door, reappearing instantly with a stool of his own manufacture.

"Rest on this, an' you are not too tired," he said, extending it. "This helve is nearly done," he resumed, occupying his bench again, "and all the time I followed the grain with the knife, and smoothed it with the glass, and polished it with the rag, I was wondering how many years it took for it to come up from nothing to be something—to be wood—to be the toughest and strongest wood that grows."

The saddler-preacher eyed the workman with a squint of curiosity, the while he nursed one knee.

 "Now I would call that a most unusual" he declared, presently. "I have looked

upon hickory saplings and hickory trees all my life long, but a notion like that never entered my head."

The other derelict smiled faintly.

"That's because you're not a philosopher," he explained. "To me a drop of dew with moonlight on it is wonderful as the world. To you it is a clear drop of water. In consequence, I live, while you merely breathe and eat and sleep and move about."

Noey Mole twisted on his stool and ran his tongue over his lips surreptitiously.

"Phew! I'm dry—thirsty! Not from your talk, friend Fode, but from my tramp hither."

"The water sits just within, on a shelf. It's good and cool. Help yourself."

Noey nervously shifted his laced fingers to his other knee and drew it up toward his chest.

"I've a misery, too," he added, silyly. "It comes on me with undue exercise, and can be relieved only by spirits." He pressed a hand to his side with a low groan. "Does it chance you have a small quantity of strong waters—say, whisky?"

With gaunt face twisted from eagerness and appetite, he waited for an answer.

Guileless as a child, Mordecai laid aside his work and arose.

"I keep spirits, yes. It stands me in good stead in little illnesses. I'll fetch it."

And as he went within a second time the wastrel on the stool shook in anticipative glee.

When Mordecai Fode came out again he brought with him a stone jug stoppered with corncob.

"It's old, and I think you will find it fairly good," he said, giving the jug to the clutching hands which were shamelessly out-thrust to receive it. "I use little, and only when need makes me."

"Aye, 'tis treacherous stuff, indeed," Noey glibly acquiesced, wrenching the corncob out and putting the neck to his lips. Thrice he drank, deep draughts each time, but the placid mind of the skins-and-leather man had already reverted to his interrupted task, and he did not see.

Noey Mole nursed the jug on his skinny legs, while an expression almost beatific stole over his hungry, whisky-seared face. The stuff was as the water of life to him.

"It is good liquor, friend Mordy," he murmured, after a few moments had sped, and he had begun to feel the first tiny thrills of elation. "The pain will ease now, and I thank you. . . . But whither is the bear?"

For some time he had been looking about for the big brute.

"Paddyfoot's in the woods, looking for food."

"Will he not stray, and perchance leave you?"

Again the wan, fleeting smile.

"No; he's a good bear and a smart bear. Every day he goes forth, and each evening he comes in. He won't leave me."

The helve finished at last, Mordecai dropped one end to the ground and leaned it against the bench. Then, hands on knees and bending slightly forward, he appeared to be trying to think. His lean face puckered, and his eyes became troubled. Noey Mole took advantage of this abstraction to imbibe more of the jug's contents. The other paid no heed to the action, and appeared to be oblivious of his caller's presence. It seemed that his mind was in turmoil; that the vital portion of his brain was struggling to awake and speak. Mordecai shifted his hands, then his feet, in short, jerky motions, and all the while he stared hard at the ground in front of him, his face furrowed and drawn. This silent wrestling

lasted for two or three minutes, and during it Noey Mole sat hugging the jug, wordless. He knew of nothing to say, and he simply waited for the seizure or whatever it was to pass. It did pass, after a while. The philosopher's worried face unclouded, his eyes which had gleamed as though under great pain cleared to their normal semi-vacant gaze, and he sighed and drew his hand down over his forehead and face with the gesture of one wiping away a web or a veil.

"Yes, Paddyfoot's a good bear," he muttered. "He will come home at sundown and put his chin on my lap, and I will pet him."

He lifted his head and blinked toward the tree-tops for a few moments in a bewildered way. Then as he brought his eyes to his observant caller the wan smile came again.

"Did you say it was good?" he queried, in gentle tones.

"Most excellent! And the pain in my side is all gone. . . . No doubt you wonder why I have come to Beechum's Woods and searched until I found you?"

The skins-and-leather man put out a hand and lightly rubbed the shining piece of wood at his side—caressed it, in fact.

"I had not thought—but you must have a mission—it must be of importance—for I have lived here long, and none seek me."

"I come in the name of Love and Youth," returned Noey, his eyes, beginning to blear afresh, suddenly aglow with a tender light.

"Ah! The lost maiden, perhaps! And there is news?"

"Nay, but there will be soon. Her lover is here, and together with that stalwart stranger sojourner, is seeking her night and day. They will find her, if they haven't already. The lover brought

gold for ransom, but the other counselled a search first, and the treasure-trunk lies now at the home of Captain Pembroke. But I doubt me if it lies there long."

Undisguised perplexity sat upon Mordecai's countenance, and he shook his head slowly.

"Mack Leek's on the rampage," the saddler-preacher's tongue ran, for it was now well oiled. "He stole the girl and he's hiding her in a hole somewhere, hoping to get his hands on the ransom. He knows the young men have an inkling as to where she is, and may locate her any minute, for they are camping on the cliffs."

"I pray she may be delivered," said Mordecai Fode.

"I was looking for a raid last night from Leek and his gang," Noey babbled on, "but somehow they didn't come. Now sure as the sun goes down back of these woods that devil'll make a try for the gold to-night. And he ain't too good to burn and kill; he's done it before. As for the captain, he could look out for himself, but he's got a daughter who's an angel. She came to me once when I was down and sick, getting over snakes, and brought me some smelly, cooling stuff that my stomach could hold, and by God! I'm going to fight for her this night! If Mack Leek comes with his cutthroats, bent on robbery and maybe murder, somebody's going to feel hot lead inside him!"

Genuine feeling and the potent liquor now rioting through him combined to flush his cheeks and lend a lusty vigor to his words. He placed the jug on the ground and leaned toward his listener, pointing at Mordecai with a curiously shrivelled forefinger.

"And I want you to help me!" he added, in sibilant eagerness.

The philosopher's calm remained unbroken at this fervent request. He continued to eye the figure on the stool with his customary phlegmatic air.

"No, I didn't come just for a chat," pursued Noey. "I came in the name of Love and Youth to ask you to help me."

Again a shadow as of something far reminiscent and but fitfully glimpsed welled up and darkened the steady eyes, and lines sprang to the smooth forehead. But shadow and lines both vanished almost before they could be perceived, and Mordecai was speaking, a bit heavily.

"What have I to do with Love and Youth? I knew them once, I suppose—and I knew—I knew—long years——" He drew his lips together hard, swallowed, and said kindly: "I am not a fighter, but a man of peace and a philosopher. I have no weapon, and I shed no man's blood. Is there not a Book, and is it not written—'Who so sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed'? I seem to remember."

"Aye!" retorted Noey Mole, eagerly. "It says that, and it says too that 'He who takes the sword shall perish by the sword.' You can't beat me on Scripture, friend Mordy. But I did not come to ask you to join me in the fray, knowing your peaceful habits. My idea was entirely different, and it came to me nigh noon to-day as I sat in the tap-room of the Leaning Stump and took counsel with a swallow of brandy from Master Hull's store. This misery in my side was gnawing me even then, and as I sat and sipped, and sipped yet more—for the pain is stubborn at times, and usually when the sun is just overhead—my mind wandered to the outlaw Leek and the ransom gold and the sweet girl who brought me the stomach-cooling, smelly stuff when I lay weak and undone

from battling with huge snakes and scorpions which had buttons of green fire in their heads, for eyes. And I argued to myself that it would be a cruel shame to let that whiskered villain attack the home of one who had succored me in distress, and maybe burn it but what he got the ransom, for everyone knows fire will not hurt gold. Then I realized the countryside was terrorized because of this brute of a bandit; people afraid to speak their own names because of his heavy fist, and I says to myself—"What shall I do, and where shall I go?" As it chanced I had but swallowed another gill or two of brandy when this thought popped into my head and therefore I give Cadwallader Hull credit for the answer which my mind gave. Aye, yield it to him freely, in spite of the fact that he often chinks up two drinks against me when he serves only one. Which may be business, but no Christian act, and I working hard for my pence and turning nearly all of it over to Master Hull as I do. Well, inspired no doubt by the brandy, my brain answered at once, and this is what it said: "Get you to Mordecai Fode, you dolt, and ask him to loan you his big bear." So up I jumped, forgetting my reckoning—and the same Master Hull won't, with interest added—and turned my face toward Beechum's Woods. And a grievous time I had getting here! But here I am, and I pray you—loan me your bear!"

During this feverish outburst Mordecai Fode sat with clasped hands mildly regarding the speaker. His partially fettered mind saw nothing humorous in this hot-voiced request, and he seemed vaguely pained that he must refuse it.

"Paddyfoot's a good bear," he began, his tones mellow with affection, "but he is a bear of peace. We do not fight, Paddyfoot and I. We are gentle with each other, and love each other. . . ."

Paddyfoot loves honey," he added, in a slightly lower key.

Noey's nervous fingers found the handle of the jug, and hoisted it to his lap. He began to feel pity for the lonely man before him, who had been so courteous and hospitable.

"I thought all bears would fight," he resumed, deftly working at the stopper with finger and thumb, "and I thought of how yours would scare those rascallions charging in the night."

"They would shoot, you know," answered the skins-and-leather man, "and they might kill Paddyfoot, or break his leg. I couldn't stand that, for we've been friends long—ever since he was a little woolly puppy, and I found him whining and crying in the woods. I wish you well, and pray release for the maiden, and success for the lovers—lovers—youth——" he stopped and pressed his hand to his eyes for a long time, and it was then the nondescript-clad outcast on the stool drank again. "I should like to go—to go," the sweet voice came once more, a little strained and dulled, "but I make good helves, and stout ropes of raw-hide, and Paddyfoot sits by my knee and watches me smooth the wood or twist the hide. Then we tramp the road to New Market, and on court days to Cedarton, and sell—two bits for a helve, and the same for a whip. . . . Did you say it was good? It is old, and has a winey flavor, as I remember. I haven't tasted it for several months."

"Far better than can be got at any public, indeed. 'Tis sweet as honey and mild as rain-water—a rare beverage. . . . Now perhaps I was wrong to ask for the loan of your big bear, but the idea came to me of how he would frighten the rascals, and I was planning to lead him with a rope."

"Paddyfoot is never tied, and he follows no one but me."

"Oho! So I've had my journey for nothing!" Noey gave an airy sweep with one of his spindling arms. "But that is not true, on its very face," he hastened on, with a quizzical grimace. "You have entertained me royally and given me cheer, for which I thank you." He arose and stood, swaying slightly. "And now I will be on my way. The sun drops lower, and the forest is shadowy. Peace be with you, Mordecai Fode, and happiness, and dreamless sleep!" The gaunt, half-ragged form drew itself very erect as the last words were spoken, and the arms were held straight out, palms down, as though invoking a blessing. For the space of two breaths the tableau remained; Mordecai with crossed legs and folded hands relaxed against the wall of his hut, his mild blue eyes inexpressive, while over him towered the drunken Noey, breathing a benediction with rum-soaked lips. The arms fell, and with a sound which was half laugh and half sob the preacher turned and strode across the clearing, his gait uncertain. At the edge of the surrounding wood he turned, waved his hand in a fanciful twist, then bounded away among the beeches, over the soundless carpet of last year's leaves, which shone beneath his vagrant feet in varied patterns of sombre beauty.

XIX

Recounting the peculiar home-coming of Uncle Bacchus; taking a brief glimpse into a young maiden's heart; and hearing sounds of portent from the highway.

Four times since three o'clock had Mistress Dorothy Pembroke tripped across the big yard to stand just outside the gate giving onto the highway and gaze eagerly down the road. She was watching for Uncle Bacchus. By all methods of calculation he should have arrived not later than mid-afternoon, but at five o'clock, when the anxious young lady made her last trip, he had failed to appear. Dorothy was growing uneasy, and all sorts of fantastic fears were beginning to possess her. The errand of Saul and Gaston was a dangerous one; the scene of their operations was wild and desolate, and would lend itself admirably to any hidden act of crime. The old negro was two hours late, and as the sun steadily sank lower, and no sound of hoofs heralded the approach of the long looked for rider, a panic fear seized the girl. She suddenly grew weak and leaned against the whitewashed gate, her eyes wide with apprehension and her face pale. Had some evil happened to the sturdy, laughing young fellow who only yesterday had held her to him till she was all but breathless, and told her of his love? The cliffs were treacherous and lonely, and Mack Leek crafty and cruel. Had he followed the seekers and wrought violence to her handsome knight? And had Uncle Bacchus, too,

fallen into the man's clutches? Else why was he not home with some reassuring message? As Dorothy brooded and brooded, and her mind became more and more charged with all manner of horrible things, she let her fair head fall upon her arm and sobbed gently, as a child might who felt itself abused. For night was coming soon, and an awful loneliness and dread had settled over her. It was the voice of age, raised in a whining falsetto, which caused her to look up.

Now it must be told that the cause of Uncle Bacchus's delay was an abiding and undue love for spirits frumenti. It cannot be stated authoritatively that his appetite was due in any way to his name, although the two went excellently well together. But whenever chance offered the old servitor indulged his bibulous nature, and as he posted homeward with the shining half-eagle clamped in one withered hand, his thoughts turned more and more to a certain tavern which sat somewhat out of his way, but where he knew of a verity much delightful stuff was stored. Uncle Bacchus had no earthly use for money other than to enjoy it at once. His master fed and clothed him, and thus all necessary wants were supplied. If a chance coin dropped in his palm he knew when and where to employ it. So, when he came to the parting of the way, instead of hurrying home as a good and faithful servant should, he hied him in the direction of New Market and ultimately landed in the tap-room of Cadwallader Hull. It is not needful to dwell upon his actions there, except to state that the rotund Boniface was at once struck with amazement when a gold coin from a black hand jingled upon his well-worn bar, and endeavored to draw from its owner how he chanced to get hold of it. Failing in this, the greedy landlord did his best to get possession

of the half-eagle piecemeal, plying the thirsty old soul with drink after drink, and very likely charging double for each one. Howbeit, at the expiration of an hour and a half spent joyously at the shrine of his titular divinity, the gold piece nestled in a corner of Master Hull's capacious pocket in the midst of a score of minor silver coins which had been given in change, and Uncle Bacchus, his hide well soaked in liquid returns, was hoisted astride his mount and started on his journey. It chanced the horse knew the way home, and his rider, with slack rein, trusted entirely to the animal. As they neared familiar landmarks, the surcharged soul of the temporarily emancipated bondman caused him to break forth in song.

“Swing low, sweet chari-o-o-ot,
Gwi fo' to cyar me home;
Swing low, sweet chari-o-o-ot,
Gwi fo' to cyar me home!”

Over and over he repeated the lines, swaying in his saddle like a wind-blown reed, and it was this querulous chant which caused Dorothy to start and draw herself quickly erect. At first she failed to understand the slowly moving horse and tipsy rider. As comprehension dawned and swift anger painted her cheeks the on-comer broke out afresh:

“Deb'l he chase me 'roun' de stump,
Gwi fo' to cyar me home;
Lak fo' to cotch me eb'ry jump,
Gwi fo' to cyar me home!”

Followed immediately by:

“Swing low, sweet chari-o-o-ot,
Gwi fo’ to cyar me home;
Swing low, sweet——”

But a small white fist was thumping on his side and a firm hand on the bridle had halted the tired horse. Straining upward on tiptoe, her eyes blazing and her face stormy, Mistress Dorothy pounded right vigorously the lean ribs of her delinquent messenger, the while hot words fell from her little pink tongue.

“You old dog! You hog! You——*skunk!* Where have you been, and why weren’t you here hours ago? Where’s Mr. Brentley and what did he say when he read my note and what message did he send me? Oh, I could *beat* you! I could! I could whip you with my own hand, you miserable old monkey-faced cur dog! Going and getting drunk when on *my* business and having me waiting here all this time thinking goodness knows what! You—ought—to—be—a—shamed!” Each syllable was punctuated by a blow against Uncle Bacchus’s side. It is perhaps needless to record that none of them caused him the least inconvenience so far as pain was concerned, but to the old fellow’s partially numbed brain had crept the idea that in some way he had given deadly offense, and he at once became lachrymose and repentant.

“Fo’ de Lawd, young missus; fo’ de Lawd!” he managed to whimper, and made as though to get down.

“Stay where you are!” thundered Dorothy. “What would you do on your feet, you——” She stopped for lack of a suitable word. “And answer my questions.”

“Yas’m; sut’ny.”

In his perplexity the befuddled darky lifted his

hand and dragged his hat from his head. With the action a white envelope fluttered to the ground at the girl's feet.

"If you didn't forget to——" she began, then stooped for the missive.

In the fading light she read Saul's reply to her note, and her heart sang with thanksgiving at what it revealed. The horse began to move forward at a walk and she let it go. Uncle Bacchus could give no dependable information until he became sober, and the text of the message in her hand was all sufficient pabulum for her heart that moment. They had found Margot; Saul was safe and loved her. With eyes grown moist and tender, and a sweet smile making her whole face burst into bloom, Dorothy gave a croon of happiness and impulsively pressed the sheet of paper hard to her breast. Then she turned and walked thoughtfully back to the gate, and presently was moving as though entranced across the long, shadow-filled yard toward the portico.

Bluff old Jonathan Pembroke came out of the hall in his shirt sleeves as she drew near, his forehead a-frown.

"What in the world's become o' that nigger Bacchus, d'you s'pose?" he demanded of his daughter, giving an annoyed look toward the empty road beyond.

Dorothy awoke from her maiden revery at the question and leaped lightly to her father's arms.

"Oh, he's in! Came just now and brought the most wonderful news! They've found her, papa! Saul and his friend have found our Margot! Oh, it's wonderful! They found her within twenty-four hours in all that wilderness! Don't you think them grand?"

"They did it a deuced sight quicker than I thought they would. Will they get in to-night?"

There was a veiled eagerness to the question which escaped the girl.

"Oh, no! They've found her, but they haven't released her. This they hope to accomplish soon—and they will, I know they will. It has made me so happy, papa."

Lifting her soft lips to his rough cheek she gave him a clinging kiss.

Captain Pembroke tightened his arm around the young form and stood gazing silently out into the gathering gloom.

"Aren't you glad, too?" she whispered from his shoulder.

"Of course I am," he replied, without enthusiasm; but I wish they were coming in to-night."

Something in the words brought the girl erect with a sharp exclamation.

"Why?"

No answer.

"Why do you want them so to-night, papa?"

A big hand stole up and began to stroke her hair tenderly.

"Because we may need them," he said, simply.

"You mean—"

She stopped, dreading to pronounce her fears.

"I expected it last night, but it didn't come. It'll come to-night."

Dorothy drew a deep breath, then was calm.

"Won't you tell me what he said to you this morning?" she asked. "I think you should."

Captain Pembroke folded his arms and leaned his shoulder against the pillar by which he stood.

"He wanted the gold, to begin with. He threw off his mask and openly confessed to abducting Margot. How he found out the gold was here is a mystery to me, for I didn't see him nor any of his gang when I went for it. His wickedness made me hot—of course I refused! He said he'd

deliver the girl here safe in a few hours if I'd agree to hand over the trunk. I told him if that was all he'd come to talk about he'd better leave. He got pretty wrathful then and made all sorts o' threats, and I told him to clear out and never put his foot on my place again. So he went, but he's comin' back. Since he's confessed to takin' the girl he knows that his days in this neighborhood are numbered. He's a bad man, and desperate, and whatever he does now he's got to do in a hurry, for the good people have only wanted a chance to rise up and drive him out, and now that chance's come, and he knows it."

"But what do you fear now?"

"I don't fear anything, daughter; you've used the wrong word. What I believe is that Mack Leek and his gang 'll be upon us some time to-night."

Dorothy felt a peculiar chill sweep her from head to foot, a sensation she had never felt before.

"And that is why you had all the guns and pistols got in readiness this morning?"

"Yes. He promised that if I would turn over the ransom he'd leave the country and never come back. I told him that if he got it he'd have to take it. That he swore he'd do."

Dorothy drew closer to her father in the dusk and clasped her hands over his shoulder.

"Should real danger threaten send Uncle Bacchus on your fastest horse."

The closing line to Saul's note began to beat through her brain. Over and over were the words reiterated. The bandit probably knew the young men were miles away, and was timing his assault accordingly. And real danger was at hand. The

coming hours were portentous of evil, with Uncle Bacchus dead-drunk in some haymow. None of the other slaves knew the road to the cliffs with certainty. She was helpless to summon her lover to her side.

The sound of the supper bell came clanging through the hall.

It was a silent meal, for the weight of impending danger sat on every heart.

"Hittie," said Captain Pembroke to his sister as he arose from table, "get all the able-bodied bucks together in this room as soon as they're through eatin'."

"Very well, brother," said Miss Mehitabel.

Dorothy got up and followed her father into the sitting room, which was without light. She found him at the window, gazing out into the blackness.

"Do you expect it early or late?" she asked, composedly, bending over to put her cheek against his.

"The moon'll be up in two hours or less. I hope he'll wait till then."

"You think we can hold out, don't you?"

"If the infernal rascal don't put the torch to us, I know we can. You see we're barricaded and hidden, while he'll have to move in the open. That's why I'm hopin' for moonlight."

They agreed to let the trunk stay where it was, as one hiding place was good as another providing an entrance was forced. Then as they were discussing Mack Leek's probable manner of approach Miss Mehitabel's voice came from behind them.

"The men are assembled, brother, as you wished."

A minute later Captain Pembroke stood in the doorway leading to the dining room, the two women

of the household just behind him. Gathered before him were a half-score of his black bondmen. Bareheaded they stood in awkward but respectful attitudes, rolling questioning eyes at one another. For never before had word been sent to the "quarters" for them to come in a body to the "big house," and they could not understand. Most of them were strong, hardy fellows, with plenty of toil-toughened muscle.

"Boys"—began Captain Jonathan, the cheery lilt in his voice which he nearly always employed in addressing them, and a note to which he had found they responded most readily—"there's likely to be fightin' about this house pretty soon. Mack Leek told me this mornin' that he and his bunch 's goin' to come and clean us up. D'you reck'n they can do it?"

There arose murmurs and guttural exclamations, while here and there white teeth showed where one grinned. Then a huge fellow spoke.

"Naw, sir! dat dey cain't!"

"Of course they can't, and we'll have to teach 'em a lesson. We haven't got enough firearms to go 'round. There's a long rifle, a shotgun and three pistols. You boys know who can shoot the best, so five of you step out here."

Now some quiet, good-natured strife arose among the men as to who was best qualified to answer this call. Some held back, while others wanted to respond, but were restrained by their friends. Finally their master took a hand.

"Here, Stumptoe; take this rifle. Didn't I see you shoot a hawk with it once when it's almost out o' eyesight? 'Lasses, the shotgun's for you. Dan, Mose, Crowhead; here's a pistol apiece. The rest o' you get axes, hatchets and clubs and hurry back. I don't know when the fun'll begin and we

want to be ready. Behave yourselves well to-night, and I promise you you won't be sorry."

The blacks whom he had called by name came forward and received their respective weapons, while the others left the room in quest of the articles called for. Very soon they were back again, each armed with the implement best suited to his taste.

"We've got to keep a watch on all sides," resumed Captain Jonathan, "for there's no tellin' where they'll come. I'm goin' to put you boys at different windows and I want you to keep your eyes open. The first one who sees anything will let the others know."

Forthwith the sentries were posted and immediately thereafter the lights put out. All shutters had to remain open, and a lamp could direct the fire of anyone outside. Miss Mehitabel's nerves gave way under these grim preparations, and the captain peremptorily ordered her off to bed; knowing well how quickly panic could be conveyed to the childlike minds of his retainers. The spinster vowed she would not sleep a wink that night, but the captain retorted she could at least stay in her room, so off she went. Then the master of the house took a chair by the sitting room window, a heavy revolver upon his knees. Dorothy drew a low rocker to his side, and they conversed in subdued tones as the minutes passed.

In time the dense gloom without began to thin, and very soon thereafter vanished entirely before the onrushing moonlight, which came on a myriad silver-shod feet, in silent beauty.

Dorothy gave a sigh of relief.

"Mack Leek blundered, didn't he, papa, in delaying until the moon came up?"

"He certainly did. We can meet him confidently now. You had better run upstairs and lie

down. I'll wake you if you happen to drop off to sleep."

"I think I share Aunt Hittie's feeling concerning sleep, but I'll go up."

She arose, gave her father a good-night kiss, and disappeared on soft feet.

When she reached her room she did not even undress, but went straight to a window overlooking the front yard and raised the sash. Then down upon the floor she sank, put her elbows on the sill and her chin in her cupped hands, and fell a-thinking. Not of the big robber who in all probability was on his way to that very house right then, but of one Saul Brentley, gentleman adventurer, and of how delicious it felt when she was lying crushed in his arms by the old spinet the previous morning. Never in all her young life had she felt before as she had then; never. It was of a verity the sweetest experience which had ever come to her, and she fervently hoped it would be repeated quite soon again. The "other girl" bugaboo did not seem so bad now that she had heard his earnest protestations. Probably some shameless sort who had trapped him in some way, for he was so gallant and honorable, as all true Kentucky gentlemen are. And he had left home hastily in order to get rid of her. There was no doubt in Dorothy's mind but that she herself had captivated and captured the brave young fellow. Else how could he look at her so tenderly? Else how could he say the wonderfully sweet things he did? Else why did he go on a quest where death might lurk—for her sake? Yes, he loved her! He loved her, and he would love her more and more as the days passed. In time they would marry, and the kind gloom hid the rich color which leaped to her cheeks as her

maiden thoughts ran on and on, into a long life of happiness ahead.

The sharp impact of a horse's iron shoe against a stone brought her back to the present.

With a quick-drawn breath she turned her face in the direction of the sound. Through the quiet air the thud of many hoofbeats drifted to her. For a half minute this continued, then all was silent. She strained her ears and waited, but heard nothing more alarming than the broken-winged mockingbird waking to song under the magic of the moon.

"Daughter," her father's voice sounded from the door of her room, "I think they've come."

"I heard them. I've been sitting here listening."

"There's no use in me telling you not to be afraid. But you may expect a gun or two to go off soon, and there might be a right sharp tussle. Leek means business, all right, but we've got the advantage and'll whip him easy. Don't come down. You couldn't do any good and it might be a little dangerous."

"All right, papa. I'll see you after it's over."

A short laugh came from the darkness.

"That's my girl talkin'!" exclaimed Captain Jonathan, proudly. "You're a brick, Dorry; good night."

He tramped back downstairs to visit his sentries and boost their courage.

In her room above Dorothy stuck to the window and awaited developments.

XX

Continuing the preceding one naturally, and making as clear as may be how a certain big bandit sought to gain gold to which he had no claim. Likewise mentioning a solitary horseman who rode with valor, and chronicling a conversation which some mayhap will not understand even though it is spoken in fair English.

Many forest trees grew in the three-acre yard which lay between the house and the highway. These were in full leaf, and in consequence much of the tract was in shadow. To the right of the house the ground began to slope downward a short distance away, and fruit trees were clustered here so closely that no moonlight could gain entrance. To the left, and a hundred feet toward the road, was a dense, wild goose plum thicket.

Dorothy crouched by the open window, watching and listening. She heard nothing but her bird on the side porch serenading the moon. But to her the silence boded ill. She surmised that the bandits had drawn their horses off the road and tethered them to the fence, and were making their advance on foot. But they were not traversing any of the space visible from her window. They could not come directly toward the front of the house unseen, because bright patches and broad expanses of moonlight lay everywhere. They plainly were making a flank or rear movement, and there was nothing to do but wait until they declared themselves and so revealed their

position. It was tedious waiting, and the girl was conscious of nerve-strain as the moments dragged by. The house was still and outside was still, for the mockingbird suddenly ceased his madcap jumble of tunes. Dorothy was not afraid, but she felt that if something didn't happen quickly she would jump up and scream. And as she sat huddled, clenching her hands to hold herself in place, something did happen. The peaceful night was disturbed by the terrifically loud report of a heavy revolver, and it came from the right of the house where the fruit trees were massed. Following it at once was a deep voice.

"Hello! Captain Pembroke! Are you awake?"

A few seconds later Dorothy heard her father reply. He had crossed the hall and gone into the parlor, and answered from an east window. His words reached her faintly, but she heard all he said.

"Yes; awake and ready, Leek."

"Are you goin' to hand over the gold?"

"You know I'm not."

"You know I'm goin' to get it one way or 'nother, don't you?"

"I think maybe you're not calculatin' right."

"You've got nobody there but a handful o' cowardly niggers."

"I s'pect you'll have a chance to find out how cowardly they are."

Silence under the fruit trees for a breath or two. Then:

"I've got nothin' ag'inst you, captain, and I don't want to have to fight. If it comes to that somebody's goin' to get hurt."

"I don't s'pose there's any doubt 'bout that. There's 'leven men in here, and we're goin' to give an account of ourselves. Now let me tell you

somethin'. You turn 'round and go back where you came from."

A derisive laugh greeted this suggestion.

"When we've lined our saddle-bags with that frilly Frenchman's gold we will, and not before. We're not kids out playin'. We're men, and we mean business!"

"You're damned robbers an' scoundrels, that's what you are!" shouted back Captain Pembroke; "and if you want the Frenchman's gold—come an' take it if you can!"

"All right. You've brought this on yourself. Watch out!"

Captain Pembroke stepped quickly aside from the window as a half-dozen reports came rattling out of the shadows of the trees. The bullets thumped against the walls of the house and hummed through the window, while the crashing of glass told that one had found a pane.

Dorothy rushed to the head of the stair, one hand on her breast.

"*Papa!* Are you hurt?"

His laugh floated up.

"Not even a scratch. I'll be careful. Stay where you are."

She heard him moving swiftly about, talking to the slaves.

"They can't do any good standin' out there wastin' their powder, boys. We want to lay low an' wait for 'em to rush us. That's what they're goin' to do. All of you keep your eyes skinned. Mack Leek's sly as any old fox, an' he's plannin' a surprise, no doubt. If you see any of 'em creepin' toward the house, crack down on 'em an' shoot straight."

Following the fusillade came a long silence. This could mean but one thing, and that was the attackers were hatching deviltry. If they gained

entrance to the house it would be by strategy, and Captain Pembroke determined not to be caught napping. Every window on the ground floor had a watcher, and at some two were stationed. The nearest cover to the house was the grove of fruit trees from whose shelter Leek had conducted his parley. And even here a broad belt of moonshine made any secret forward movement impossible. What they would do and how they would do it the master of the place could not surmise, but he knew full well that a plan of some sort was even then forming.

A quarter of an hour passed with no sound from outside, but Captain Pembroke did not allow the false idea that the beseigers had withdrawn to enter his head. He knew the man who led them was in deadly earnest, and was probably perfecting some plot, hoping at the same time that the vigilance of the house defenders might relax.

Suddenly a yell from the region of the kitchen echoed through rooms and halls, and the rifle of Stumptoe, who was stationed there, roared its challenge. There was a general rush to his assistance from other points, and the shotgun spoke next, followed by the staccato report of a pistol. A glance from her window showed Dorothy three or four forms dashing across the yard toward the portico, a big man in the lead. He gained the portico first, and a moment later she heard the crash of his huge body against the staunch oak doors of the hall. Suspecting a trick of some kind, the doughty captain had run back toward the front when he saw that the attack in the rear had been checked, and he felt the floor quiver under the blow on the door. Standing in the darkness by the stairway he began to empty his big Colt's at the thick panels which had withstood the shock. And as Dorothy, with hands

gripped, mechanically turned her face again toward the yard, she saw a spurt of flame leap from the edge of the wild goose plum thicket, and heard a bullet tear its way into a pillar of the portico below. What could it mean? A wild hope, half formed, leaped to her mind. This was help, but who could it be? And who that solitary horseman dashing madly down from the road? From the shelter of the thicket a half dozen forms appeared, running toward the house. In front was a tall, lank figure which gesticulated and reeled and shouted as it ran. More shots blazed out from this band, and a tongue of fire showed above the racing horse's ears as a pistol yapped viciously in its rider's hand. Confusion followed. Dorothy leaned from her window, bewildered, thrilling with a breathless wish. There was a struggle on the portico; blows, cries and oaths. The horseman reined up with such abruptness that his steed came to its haunches, and dashed forward into the *melée*. The girl heard the heavy bolts thrown in the double front doors, and knew that her father had also joined the fray. Came now the heavy shuffling of feet, a fall, and added blows. But the combat was short. Such of the raiders as kept their feet began to run. Then Dorothy, taking a lace shawl, crept down to the landing of the stair and peeped over. A negro wench had lighted a lamp and come into the hall. Placing the light on a side table, she retreated rapidly. Some one was lying very still on the floor of the portico; she could see his legs up to his knees, and they looked curiously twisted. She shivered as she glided to the last descent. There was bustle and talking in the rest of the house. A black man passed through the hall on a trot, seeming gigantic and *Doréesque* in the imperfect

light. Then her father appeared all at once from outdoors.

"Papa!" she called, her voice sounding little and far away, "is it over?"

"All over, child," he answered, cheerily; "and you'd better wait till we clean up a bit."

Feeling weak in spite of her courage the young lady sat down at the top of the flight.

"You aren't hurt the least bit, are you, papa?" she wanted to know.

"Not a scratch. Crowhead got a chance bullet in his arm and Dan got his nose mashed."

He was reloading his cap and ball pistol as he spoke.

"How about the other side?" the anxious voice went on.

"Oh, they got what's comin' to 'em, I reckon."

"You're hiding from me, papa. Who—who's that with his feet sticking out in the light?"

"That's one o' the bunch. I haven't had time to go over the field. Some of 'em got handled pretty roughly, an' they're after the others now."

"Who are 'they'? Who are the folks that came to our assistance? Neighbors?"

"Yes, in a way. It was that loon-headed Noey Mole got up the squad. Big Sam and Little Sam are among 'em, an' I b'lieve I saw that fellow Stout, who calls himself an Englishman. They got here 'bout in time, I reckon."

Captain Jonathan had rammed each chamber of the cylinder hard and tight, and was now searching his pockets for the small tin box which held the caps for the nipples.

"Papa?"

The word was almost timid.

The sturdy old gentleman glanced up from his occupation.

"Who was the man on horseback?" she continued.

"I didn't see anybody on horseback. When I threw the door open some were on their own backs and a lively scrimmage was goin' on."

"A man rode straight down the yard and joined the relief squad. I saw him from upstairs."

"You did?"

"Yes, sir!"

Voices sounded without and some men came into the hall. Among them were the Pottles and Saul Brentley.

"Bless me!" exclaimed Captain Pembroke, "but I'm glad to see you all!" He began shaking hands right and left. "An' where's that addle-pated Noey, the smartest one o' the bunch, an' how'd he know this fight's comin' off? Did you get the ringleader? Brentley, where'd you come from?" He moved gladly about plying questions.

"The big one got away, I expect," drawled Big Sam Pottle, "but he didn't go back the way he come. D'you know the scamp rode the hoss he stole from me? As our crowd's comin' 'long the road we passed their hitchin' place, and I saw my white-stockin' geldin'. I didn't do nothin' but untie 'im and lead 'im off. He's back o' the plum thicket this minute." Big Sam laughed softly.

Captain Pembroke waved his arm in a sweeping invitation.

"Come on back to the dinin'-room, men, and we'll take somethin' to celebrate the victory. . . . Hey, Judy!"—to an unseen servant—"light up in there an' bring the big jug from the cellar!"

He disappeared in the sitting-room followed by

willing feet, and presently only one was left standing by the open doors gazing perplexedly about him. Directly he went into the parlor, remained a moment, then reappeared and stood at the foot of the stair, rubbing his chin thoughtfully with his hand. Then as his reluctant feet turned to join the crowd which had gone with the master of the plantation, he heard his name called.

"Saul!"

He stopped abruptly with an upward toss of his head and swept his eyes around eagerly. Behind the baluster at the first landing he saw a patch of white, and two seconds later he was crouching by her side.

"Don't, Saul! You hurt!" she whispered, struggling in his arms and succeeding thereby in drawing yet closer to him.

He made no reply to her foolish protest, but fed his starved lips on the dainty manna of her neck and cheeks and lips—long, fervent, soundless kisses which transported Dorothy from that scene of combat and death to a fairy spot where love made all glorious. So overcome by rapture was she that after a few moments she fought her prisoned arms loose and threw them passionately about the young man's neck, straining him to her in a return embrace with all the might of her body. Then, the first storm passed, she gave a little shiver, placed her fair head against his neck, and nestled there with a tremulous sigh. The powerful breathing of his deep broad chest made her smile happily. Brentley had not spoken a word. The consciousness of her intimate nearness and the abandon with which she had responded to his caresses had unbalanced him for the time. The first sight of her huddled on the stair had sent his pulses thrumming and driven his eager feet racing upward to the bright goal

of her eyes. He had sunk down at her side and gathered her to him in silent ardor, knowing only the joy of beholding her again, unhurt and speaking his name. Then the undefinable woman-smell which was almost a perfume had gradually crept to his brain and in a measure narcotized it, for he was a healthy young man profoundly in love, and the object of his affection had made an unmistakable manifestation of her tender feelings toward him. So, her warm, soft arms about his neck, his muscle-clothed arms in strong protection about her waist, they kept in silence their first love-vigil together.

From the dining-room floated sounds of was-sail. Much laughter was in evidence, jokes were cracked, and at last one started a song. Clad in a sombre wrapper, and on slippered feet which gave forth not even a whisper of sound, Miss Mehitabel made her exit from the room across from Dorothy's and started to come down. Before she reached the first step she saw, and drawing back with tightened lips, stared. How huge the man-lover looked in the indifferent light! One knee-booted leg was thrust down two steps; the other hidden by white skirts aflame. And how small the girl-lover seemed, wrapped up and almost invisible in the man-lover's arms! How quiet they were! Not the slightest movement. Their breathing had sunk again to normal and could not be heard. Miss Mehitabel's hand had gone to her throat when she first beheld them, in scandalized dismay. But the ghost of something which she might once have known had she listened to her human nature awoke, and walked in an empty chamber of her heart. Slowly her expression changed. There were none to see had it been light, and she stood in gloom. She swal-

lowed, batted her lids quickly against the encroaching moisture, then noiselessly withdrew.

"Oh, Saul!"

It was a breath of sound only, but back in the man's mind when he heard it sprang a vivid picture. A sheltered hollow, beech roots near a woodland spring, a black-haired girl tight in his arms even as this honey-haired girl was now, and that same heartfelt cry from the other's lips—"Oh, Saul!" He shut his eyes and shook his head rebelliously at the recollection which the two words awakened, then to cloak his action bent his lips to that mass of hair which when he had first seen he had likened to honey. And as he felt her quiver and cuddle in response to the kiss, he realized for the first time the magnitude of his folly back home. Jinsy was one of the other sex and possessed of a certain untamed, gypsy loveliness, and he really thought he loved her—back home. But now! The feeling which this ready-tongued, violet-eyed maiden had evoked was far different; it was also nameless. And he who would try to define love had better abandon the task before he begins it.

"Saul! Saul! Saul!"

In sighing half breaths his name was whispered again, as though she who uttered it could not believe he was really there.

"My Dorothy! My very own precious and only Dorothy!" he raved back, in a guarded undertone.

"What have you done since morning, and why are you here?"

"Since starting Uncle Bacchus home I waited a thousand years for night, and ten thousand more till Gaston gave me an idea."

She gave a low gurgle and put a palm to his cheek.

"You boy!—You sweet boy!"

"And it took me nine hundred and ninety-nine years to ride from the cliffs here."

"What did thrice blessed Gaston say that sent you to me?"

"He wanted a rope."

"What for? Surely it's not suicide with Margot found!"

"No; the lad's desperate. You see, we've found the hiding-place, but not the entrance. He swears he will die if he cannot speak to her. The opening in the cliff where she is held is about twenty feet from the top. I am to let him down between midnight and morning and he will talk with her through the hole."

"Oh, the brave fellow! Isn't that romantic? He'll surpass Romeo, won't he Saul?"

"I've learned to love him," was the serious reply.

"Did you know you came out of your way for your rope? New Market is much nearer."

With quick finger and thumb he grasped her chin and twisted her face up to his. His fear was groundless. Her eyes, velvety black in that light, were flashing fun.

"You rogue!" he chided, half seriously. "Don't say those things. I'd have ridden to the other side of the world to have seen you to-night!"

There was something in the quality of his voice, and in the very words themselves, which caused her to lift herself in his arms and turn squarely toward him. His eyes were almost solemn under his partly drawn brows and his lips had shaped to a faint smile. Impulsively she clasped his face in her hands and pulled it toward her.

"Do you mean it, my Saul?" she demanded, and never before had the man heard such earnest

words from her lips. "Do you love me with all yourself—every bit of you—every atom and every molecule and every blood-drop in your veins?"

Though the words were low they were tense and charged with strongest emotion. Saul felt a tremor vibrate through the delicate fingers alongside his temples, and in the beautiful eyes so close to his burned fires which nothing but the torch of love could have kindled. He felt his heart leap in answer to her fervor.

"Better than earth or heaven! Forever and forever!" he gravely replied, and as her white lids fluttered down at this assurance he pressed them tighter yet with his lips, then begged her to open them at once that he might get another glimpse of heaven through the portals of her eyes.

From the dining-room came the strains of an old sea chantey led by Ephri-ham Stout, who had really come with the rescuers. The staves which he bellowed forth were more noisy than tuneful, and were broken by hiccoughs.

"Who was it that was killed?" asked Dorothy, a little later, as she looked again for the evidence which had lain just outside on the portico floor. The man had been removed.

"I think it was the little hoop-legged ferryman."

"Oh! Jews-harp George! He was a bad man, but I'm sorry he ended this way. He was papa's overseer at one time," she went on, crossing her arms on her knees with hands dangling. "He fell in with Mack Leek, to be very brief, and one night he was caught trying to smuggle off a slave. Leek was to sell him and divide the price. Papa gave George a beating that night and discharged him. The ferryman at that time had grown old

and feeble, so George took the job. He deserved his fate, but I'm sorry."

"I remember, the first and only time I saw him, that he spoke bitterly of Captain Pembroke."

"I think he was a half-breed of some kind, and very revengeful." Then, with renewed interest: "Too bad Mack Leek got away. I wish they could have captured him and jailed him."

"I have a feeling that he will not be here long to harrass us."

Dorothy turned with a hand on his arm.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that Chavannes is longing to catch sight of him once more."

"What would the slender Frenchman do in the grip of that giant?"

"I thought as you do until he showed me. I believe he's made of steel—pliant steel, instead of sinew and flesh. I tire before he does."

"You don't!" In ready denial of aught which would reflect in any way upon him.

Saul smiled at her impetuous exclamation, and took her hand.

"Dorothy, let us not forget in this hour of blissful happiness that I ride again to-night. Already I have delayed at least a half hour longer than I should. This instant the faithful Gaston is pacing back and forth waiting for the moment of my arrival. I must go."

She bent toward him with newly awakened concern in her eyes.

"But that awful man—that Leek—will he not be traveling the same road? Will he not try for revenge now that he has lost the gold?"

"I believe he will."

Her arm brushed his shoulder and folded around his neck.

"Then—" but the one word was all that would

come. Her chin slowly sank till he could no longer see her face.

"Then I must hasten; that is what you mean. Gaston is waiting for me to fulfill my trust, and Margot is utterly helpless should Leek wish to work her any harm. I do not believe he will tarry long, for he has played his last card and lost, and now he is a hunted man. I don't want to frighten you needlessly, but to such as he the death of this girl in his power would be sweet recompense for his failure here."

"Oh, *could* he do such a thing?"

"I wouldn't put it beyond him. At the least he will try to spirit her away to a new hiding-place. Now help me find a long, stout rope, and I'll be off."

For a moment she clung to him in silence, then her head came up and her gaze met his bravely.

"Had you not better take help with you?"

Brentley nodded toward the dining-room, whence issued ever-increasing sounds of hilarity.

"There are none here in condition, and we do not need them, anyway. In an undertaking of this sort they would do more harm than good. Leek's band is broken, and I suspect will scatter. If he rides to the cliffs it will not be with more than two companions at the most."


Dorothy checked a sigh as she arose.

"The rope now, little girl," reminded Brentley, standing beside her. "Remember hours turn to minutes when Cupid runs the clock."

They gained the hall and stopped by the table holding the lighted lamp. Dorothy pinched her lip and thought.

"There's no use going to papa—but wait! I'll run across to the quarters and ask one of the men to get it."

"And I'll run with you!" declared Saul.



The rope which was presently forthcoming proved to be a hempen cable strong enough to hang an ox. It was hurriedly measured, found to be long enough, and coiled. Then, a shawl about the girl's shoulders because of the chill of the spring night, the twain walked around the house to where a servant had tethered Saul's horse.

"What time is it?" asked Dorothy.

Brentley tugged his watch from his waistcoat pocket.

"Two minutes till eleven."

"How the time flies!"

"Faster to-night than ever before for me."

"Is your horse well rested? He seems fagged."

"That's his way of standing. He'll carry me back as swiftly as he brought me here."

"Saul?"

"Yes, dearest."

"Hold me closer. I—I think I'm bewildered, and a little afraid, maybe."

Now both arms encompassed her and he bent his shoulders and hovered over her, protectingly.

"No wonder, sweet child. Enough has happened to-night to upset anyone."

As he held her, she could barely see past his cheek up into the whitened sky.

"Saul, if the moon really were made of green cheese, would you try to get me a piece if I wanted it?"

He laughed happily and hugged her tighter.

"Yes, indeed—and stop for a pail of milk in the Milky Way as I came back—you precious silly!"

"Then I know you love me—and now you must go! The thought tears at my heart. How can I be so selfish?"

"All lovers are. Have I not prolonged my trip hither beyond all reasonable limits?"

"But you needed rest!" shyly.

"Ten minutes, perhaps; certainly not an hour when such grave matters are ahead. Let me fasten my rope."

He tied it to the cantle of the saddle and turned.

"Tell the captain why I had to go back to-night, and congratulate him for me on the outcome of this affair."

"I will."

That was her sole reply, and to Brentley she seemed so lonely and miserable that he almost wished for the time there were neither Margot nor Gaston to drag him away. With the gathered reins in one fist he held out his arm and she came and stood against him, looking at him with big, troubled eyes.

"Saul, I—believe—I—could cry!"

"No—no! Bid me away with a laugh instead!"

"Promise you'll be careful?"

"I will."

"And will rescue Margot in the morning?"

"If humanly possible."

"And don't let Mack Leek sh—shoot you!"

"I always shoot first."

"Then good-bye, and God keep you till you come again!"

He crushed her to him in a farewell embrace, and with the attar of her kiss upon his lips, flung astride the big chestnut and went pounding over the sod toward the road.

When the far sound of galloping hoofs could be heard no longer Dorothy became aware that she was inexpressibly tired. The captain's guests were beginning to leave, so she slipped around to the side porch and gained her room by a back stair.

One long breath after she had crept to bed, and
she *sep.*

XXI

Harking back to the lonely highway leading to the cliffs; viewing as interested spectators an adventure on the road, and leaving hero-number-two without an inch of ground to stand upon the while our Saul broods on sundry matters.

Saul rode hard. Once away from the sorcery of Dorothy's presence, a sense of duty deferred urged him to the greatest speed. While not breaking faith with his absent comrade in adventure, he had in a measure strained it, and his conscience went to the spurs on his heels and put them in action. The blooded animal beneath him needed but the slightest touch from the pricking steel to make him snort, rear, then plunge forward like a bolt from a catapult. Though the night was calm the wind shrieked in Saul's ears as he sped along, and the roadside trees reeled by him as though drunken. Not once did he tighten rein in brief respite from exertion for the running horse. Captain Pembroke had said that his mount was tireless, and this night Brentley was putting him on his mettle. But as mile after mile stretched behind them there was no inclination on the part of the chestnut to slow up. On the contrary he had taken the bit in his teeth, and with his iron jaws clamped seemed to gather greater speed with each leap. Neck out, ears flat, mane tossing, up hill and down the terrific pace was maintained. Saul's mind vacillated between the immediate past and the immediate future as he was being borne furiously along. Dorothy

was his—and the thought to his mind was as honey to his lips. Forgotten that hour was his solemn vow to Jinsy. Ahead was Gaston, fretting at his delay—and what else? Had Mack Leek taken another horse and already sped to his revenge? If this were true, Saul felt that he would be accursed forever in his own sight. He had dallied where white arms and warm lips and love-lit eyes had called, and the delay might prove fatal to the dear friend who had trusted him. The thought put a barb in his breast and he longed for wings. Yet a bird could scarcely go faster than the racer was going now. On his own initiative, after the first tentative suggestion from the spur, the horse had worked up to his maximum speed, and Saul knew there was no use urging, for he could go no faster. The straining breath from the beast's tight throat came and went like the wheeze of a bellows, and the saddle creaked to the rhythmic swing of the rider. The thump of hoofs was regular as the strokes of a trip-hammer. Brentley fell to marveling at the wonderful endurance here displayed. And he knew that Captain Jonathan's boast was not idle words. Such horses there were—his own favorite at home belonged to the breed—and they would go till their hearts burst before they would stop.

He was nearing the approach to the cliff country when he saw something ahead. At this point the road was straight for quite a distance, and the moonlight revealed an indistinct object in front. He could not make out what it was, but anything looked suspicious that time of night on this unfrequented road. He was rapidly overtaking whatever it was, and presently knew it for a horse and rider. Saul thought he saw the man look back, and then raise his right arm a number of times in quick succession. In the next half-

minute the gap widened between them, then Brentley began to close in again. Nothing made of flesh could keep ahead of that living engine he bestrode. Now a suspicion found lodgment in his brain which caused him to shift the bridle to his left hand and grasp his revolver with his right. He drew nearer and nearer with incredible swiftness. The other horse was doing its best, urged on by the whip in its rider's hand, but its feet seemed weighted. A dozen more leaps, and Saul knew who it was. Over one shoulder streamed and waved a long beard, and the man's form had assumed big proportions in the lessened distance. Brentley felt his heart harden as he raised his arm and curved his forefinger around the trigger of his weapon. But the wave of primal hate passed as quickly as it came, and he lowered his hand. Whatever the vile Mack Leek had done, this would be murder. He thundered by the outlaw as a swallow would outwing a crow, speaking no word, and with scarcely a glance. Then he had cause to bless the flying hoofs which bore him on so swiftly, together with the mellow moonshine which dropped its illusive veil behind him. For the still night roared all at once with the crash of a pistol, again and again, as the miscreant bandit tried savagely for the life of Saul. Brentley heard the bee-like hum of one bullet by his head, but the rest must have gone wild. If his brave horse were hit he gave no sign, but tore on in the direction of the gullied, deserted land which was his goal. Not over two miles and they would be there, where Chavannes was chafing and wondering.

Then Saul suddenly felt a tremor between his tight-held knees. The slender, shapely barrel which had borne him so bravely and well wavered and rocked, and as he kicked free from the

stirrups, intuitively sensing disaster, the noble animal came crashing to the earth. The man alighted upon his feet and sprang away. Rolling upon its side as though to rest, the big chestnut moved its forelegs once or twice, feebly, made an effort to rise, then snorting bloody foam from its nostrils, quivered and lay still.

From down the road came the steady thud of other hoofs. A bush growing densely by the old rock fence gave the necessary suggestion. A short time later Saul crouched behind it, the hempen rope on one arm and his revolver in hand. He was reasonably sure that his oncoming enemy had not reloaded, and but for the sheath knife which he carried was unarmed. Brentley made his plan in the fraction of a minute, and, peering through the leaves, leaped to the middle of the highway at the right time and covering the bandit, ordered a halt. Mack Leek pulled up with an angry curse, observed the carcass lying partly in the shadow of the fence, and chuckled.

"I thought I'd get one of you!" he cried.

Saul ignored the remark.

"You'll oblige me by getting off that horse!" he said, coldly.

"What? You're goin' to try my game, are you, and be a highwayman too?"

The speech was uttered with a malicious sneer, and now the keen eyes of Brentley saw the big fellow working covertly with one hand at his belt.

"Don't try to throw that knife," he ordered, "or you're a dead one! I know you're desperate, but there's no use killing yourself. Drop that knife at once, or I'll shoot!"

He advanced two steps nearer as he spoke. The outlaw hesitated.

"Drop it, I say!"

Then an object which glinted in the moonlight was tossed to the roadside.

"That's your empty pistol," spoke Saul, his tones indicating rising wrath. "Are you going to make me kill you? I have warned you the last time. Be quick!"

Venting his rage in unintelligible mutterings, Leek whipped the knife from its sheath and flung it after the other weapon.

"Now 're you satisfied, whipper-snapper?" he growled.

"Only partly. Get off that horse."

"What're you goin' to do?"

"Attend to some business."

"If you take my horse it'll be robbery, and here we treat horse thieves like we do murderers."

This unparalleled impudence might have rendered Brentley desperate had it not amused him. He retorted:

"Then I wonder how you have escaped so long, for your occupation is thieving. Not only stealing horses as you stole from the Pottles a few nights ago, but it would appear helpless young women as well. And that is one reason why I don't send a bullet through you now, and be done with you."

Mack Leek bent forward over the neck of his tired mount.

"What do you mean?" he asked, curiously.

"I mean that if you persist in your deviltry the lover of the girl you have so mistreated will literally cut your flesh from your bones in strips. He is waiting on the cliffs whither I journey in a very few moments. And he wants to see you—just once."

The other tried to laugh derisively, but no mirth showed.

"Now I've talked to you as long as I care to,"

resumed Saul. "Get down and stretch out flat on that grass over there."

"What for?"

"Because I told you to, in the first place, and because in the second place, I'm going to truss you up well."

With expostulations and threats of vengeance which fell on heedless ears, Mack Leek swung himself to the ground next to that side of the road where he had tossed his weapons.

"You have a queer left-handed way of getting off a horse," observed Brentley, coolly. "Now, you crafty devil!" he continued, advancing rapidly, "go to the other side of the road where I told you to go, and stretch out. And if you want to see another sunrise on this earth, don't even crook your finger!"

Driving the stubborn man to do his bidding at the point of a pistol, Saul quickly had him bound tightly, arms and legs.

"Now you may lie there a while and meditate upon your sins and the advisability of choosing a new field for your operations," counselled the young man as he arose from making the last knot fast. "And remember. If, when you have succeeded in freeing yourself, which you probably will do in time, you dare to re-arm and seek to molest us in our efforts, you are doomed. Think of that before you go to sleep."

The prostrate giant made no reply.

Saul regarded him a moment longer, mentally reviewing his work on ankles, knees and wrists, then crossing the road picked up his enemy's revolver and knife. The former he threw into the adjoining field as far as his arm could hurl it, and the latter, after a moment's deliberation, followed. Then, with a farewell glance of compassion at the beast which had proved faithful unto

death, he silently mounted the bandit's horse and resumed his journey.

His progress was much slower from this point, and when he came to the rendezvous it was to find Chavannes almost frantic, pacing back and forth like a chained bear, while, lying to one side, Roderick Dhu watched him with calm eyes. It was the ever attentive ear of the devoted collie which first heard footsteps, for Saul had dismounted and hitched some distance away. And it was the dog rising and trotting eagerly forward to welcome his returning master which caused the all but demented Frenchman to halt and stare around. The coiled rope caught his roving eye as quickly as he discerned his friend, and he was dashing forward like a deer from cover.

"Oh, Saul! I thought you would never come! Yet you have brought me what I wished, and how I thank you! . . . But what has happened?"

"Everything."

The speaker bent to pat the head of Dhu.

"But if you are to talk to Margot to-night the tale must wait. It is long."

"And is all well at the homestead?"

"All well, but there's been a fight. The story must wait. In the morning you shall hear. We must move swiftly. Dawn comes within two hours."

Chavannes caught the note of weariness which could not be hidden.

"My Saul, you are tired!" he protested, in quick sympathy. "Heaven only knows what you have been through in addition to your long ride. I can wait, and you must sleep."

"No, no. There is too much to do to sleep. That can come later. Are you ready? We must work rapidly."

Gaston threw his arm around the broad shoulders in a gesture of affection.

"Never was there such a friend!" he declared fervently. "Let us go!"

Chavannes in a fever of excitement at the prospect of soon exchanging speech with his beloved. Brentley quiet and thoughtful as he strove to unriddle the secret of the cavern, the friends made fairly swift progress with the aid of the moon. Again the impatient Gaston was eager to bear in toward the river long before the proper time, and again the cooler Saul restrained him. It was near three o'clock in the morning when, after laborious search and repeated failures, they found the spot for which they were seeking. Directly across the chasm the dead oak upreared which was to guide them, ghostly and gray. At the place which they mutually agreed was the best one from which the ardent lover was to make his descent, the earth sloped at a dull angle for a half-dozen yards to the stone lip of the canon. And there, by fortuitous chance and not over three feet from the brink, a tough, sturdy little oak was rooted.

Saul pointed.

"The Fates favor us," he said. "On this incline, without that scrub tree, and no place for a foothold, I could not help you."

"Heaven is kind!" breathed the grateful Frenchman. "Is it strong?" He indicated the loosened coils which the other was already beginning to manipulate.

Saul's lips relaxed from the tired set which had held them.

"Kentucky hemp," he explained. "There is nothing stronger from which ropes are made."

Already he had constructed a loop in one end—a stationary loop, and not a running noose.

"This is for your foot," he said. "You will

stand in this with almost as little exertion as you would on land. My idea is to circle the trunk of the tree once, and make it bear the strain. When you are below I can wrap a number of times and rest for the task of pulling you back."

"Then let's begin. My heart is near suffocating me. I will whistle softly, after the manner of a night-bird I have heard in this wilderness, when I am down far enough."

Without more ado they made their way carefully to the scrub oak, Saul having ordered Dhu to remain behind and keep quiet.

"There is risk, you know," warned Brentley, "something might happen which would drop you—a sharp-edged stone to wear the strands which support you, a blunder of mine."

The eager lover's foot was in the loop to his instep as he answered:

"Had the rope to pass over drawn swords, yet would I make the effort. Do you not love, too, and do you not understand?"

"Verily I love, my Gaston, and I believe I know why you dare the depths in this wise. Are you ready?" And as Chavannes lithely crept to the treacherous verge of that awful precipice, and dropped upon his stomach to go over feet first—"Whistle a second time when you are ready to come up."

"Nay, for I fear that would be never. Let me remain as long as it is safe, and when you begin to pull I will know my time is up. I am over. Let out slowly."

With the thick rope around the staunch tree, which also bore the burden of his weight with his feet braced at its root, Saul began to pay out. The task proved surprisingly easy, for the close-fibred wood took the strain instead of his own sinews, and as he carefully paid out foot after

foot, there presently rose from the gulf a low, clear whistle, drifting up like an echo. Brentley at once wound and rewound the slack remaining, made it secure with a knot, then clambered back to where the collie crouched with inquisitive mien, his busy tail beginning to thump as his master drew near. Saul sat by the faithful animal and drew forth pipe and pouch. He figured that Chavannes would remain a half hour, and perhaps longer, did not the coming day interfere. His affectionate ardor and his steel-like frame would combine to continue his tryst to almost any limit. He would hold converse with his sweetheart. Saul knew the man, and knew that he would waken the girl even if he had to arouse the hag as well. He had gone down the cliffs with a purpose as indomitable as Fate, and he would not come back until he had accomplished his errand.

The night was absolutely still and windless. Sitting cross-legged with misty smoke-wreaths floating from his lips and one hand buried in Dhu's yellow ruff, Saul's thoughts took a deeper trend than they had for many hours hitherto. What of affairs back home? How was his father doing, and Aunt Emmeline? Was the Colonel's acute attack of gout conquered, and had Dr. Van Wyck been able to keep his patient from the bottle? He thought of Jorkins, and believed he could be trusted with the management of the big estate. Then of Sime, the devoted old darky who had half carried him up the back stair that night and had literally taken his clothes off and put him to bed. Then had all but told a lie to shield the young man from the wrath of his father. The blubbing Abe's good-bye, and the half insane, harrowing manner in which the Colonel had behaved at their farewell interview. Then, crowd her from his mind as he would, came Jinsy, to

whom he was plighted for life with a solemn vow! Jinsy, with the Romany lure of body; firm-breasted, hot-breathed, flame-cheeked, lawless. A shriver raced over Saul's entire frame as the night came back when he left her in the hollow. It was not his aristocratic name and fertile acres which she wanted. It was he. And a great, peculiar joy and peace stole over him now when he remembered how he had kept his head when she lost hers, and drew herself to him with her palms upon the ground. But what of Jinsy when he went home? It was only a few days since he left, and now a newer and truer love had already found him. Oh, how different this was! Dorothy, humanly sweet and charming as Jinsy, yet moved in an aura of half-mystic womanhood; was enveloped and surrounded as by some invisible essence which evoked something akin to a worship spirit in her lover. Did Jinsy have this too? Not for him. She was warm and palpitating with animal life, but nothing more. What of her when he went home? The question kept recurring, and each time it bulked bigger. She had no claim on him other than his oath, but what greater could she wish? Was he not a Kentucky gentleman, born and bred, and would he not keep a vow though it cast him in the dirt? And yet how could he keep it? Dorothy he loved, and Jinsy he loved not. The problem must be solved, and quickly. It was not the first time in the history of human affairs that Honor and Love had clashed. Some yielded to one and some to the other, but for his very life Brentley could not tell that night which would claim him.

XXII

Confiding to all who care to know how a Chevalier of France made love to his lady in a setting unique in affairs of the heart, and drawing near to the mystery of the hidden chamber.

The moon shone obliquely upon the ages-old wall of grayish stone against which Gaston Chavannes hung suspended with nothing more than some twisted strands beneath one foot. His descent had not been entirely free from obstructions. The surface of the wall did not present the aspect of a shorn cheese. There were irregularities in it, knots and protuberances of stone, ledges of greater or lesser depth. But these were easily passed. His great fear had been that they had missed the exact location, and it was needful for the success of his scheme that he be let down on one or the other side of the narrow opening rather than directly in front of it. He went slowly, inch by inch, and though actual fright did not for once come near the intrepid lover, he realized keenly the situation in which he was being placed. He thought of the loyal heart above him whose strong devotion and equally strong arm made it all possible, and breathed a blessing on Saul's head. Down and down. His left side was to the wall; his face upstream. Fog had arisen, and his vision was so obstructed by it that he could see but a short distance. But it seemed to him that they had judged aright. He began to doubt if the rope were long enough, for they must have gone many feet. Then his hand, sliding along the limestone

surface to assist in steadying his equilibrium, came abruptly to vacancy. With a thrill he found that he had arrived. The jagged fissure was at his side—a black, irregular scar on the brighter background. He forthwith gave the signal of which he had spoken, and instantly became stationary.

For a few moments he was silent, dreading to speak lest the old crone should likewise hear. It was then there came to his ears the ceaseless rush of water from below, the never-ending voice of the river singing to the night. He thought of her falling to sleep every evening to this lullaby; he wondered if it would soothe her slumbers so that she would be hard to waken. But conjecture of this sort was fruitless. Saul had said the dawn was not far away. He must act. Placing his face near the opening he called her in scarcely more than a whisper.

“Margot!”

Only the ceaseless murmur of the river made reply.

Listening with inclined ear for the slightest sound from within and hearing nothing, he called again, a little louder.

“Margot!”

Again the river gurgled and dimpled at the moon and went its way, but within the pitch-black cave there was no sound. Strain his ears as he would, he could not even detect any breathing. He divined that Margot slept silently, but he doubted that her companion did. The moments were racing.

“Margot! Margot!”

Sharper than ever the call was shot through the crevice, and the ear which the man turned told him that some one stirred, and there was a

sound which was half sigh and half moan. He followed it up, eagerly:

"My Margot!—darling! *C'est moi*—your own Gaston! Here! outside the cliff; over the river! Come quickly for just a word—oh, *mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!*"

For out of the darkness two arms had leaped to tug at his neck and a white, startled face with proffered lips bloomed mistily before his surprised gaze.

The kiss which followed lasted seconds or centuries; Gaston could never tell which. Clinging with one hand to the rent rock, the rope looped under his shoulder, his other arm went back of the girl's shoulder to force her nearer to him. In the ecstasy of that supreme moment time and place were both absorbed and lost as each hungry soul fed on the other's love. The thickening fog settled damply over the man; the river sang and murmured as before, and the stars kept watch over this weird tryst. At last lips were reluctantly torn from lips and the girl spoke first, whispering past his cheek.

"How is it you are here, zis way? I understan' not. My head swim. Oh, Gaston! Can it be true?"

He told her briefly and quickly, and her warm breath beat upon his mouth and face, for they still clung together.

"O my brave, true lover! How won'erful you are!" she panted. "To sink what you have dared!"

"I'd have leveled this cursed mountain of stone to its base—for you!" he vowed, meaning every word. "Does the old woman sleep?"

"Yes, and soundly—Jesus be praised! How I have pray to ze Holy Mother! An' now, you come!"

"My precious Margot!" he breathed, and glimpsing the brightness of her eyes their lips met again in a long, soundless caress.

"I am bewildered," said Chavannes, after a time. "So much to say; so much to discuss—and my poor brain is asleep. I can only say over and over 'I love you,' 'I love you'!"

"I love you!" she echoed, and her white teeth gleamed through the shadows. "I sink I could stay here forever jus' to hear zat. I am happy, happy, who sought I would never know happiness once more."

"How long have you been in this hole?" he asked, striving to pierce with his gaze the impenetrable darkness beyond.

She sighed, and stroked his forehead lightly.

"Eight—nine—maybe ten days. It seem like years."

"The devil who brought you here will pay to me, my bright little flower. And your jailer?"

"Say no ill of her, poor ol' woman! She is kin', an' she has suffer—oh, she has suffer much! Ze wonder is her heart not break. She fear her master an' I sink she owe him a kin'ness debt. She tol' me of her sad life, an' I weep wiz her, poor sing."

"Have you had plenty to eat and drink?"

"Yes, ver' good. It keep 'way hunger. It is fear zat has 'mos' kill me."

"How did you get to this place, my own? Try to think. If we could only bear you safely away in the morning!"

"I try," answered the girl, perplexedly. "You don' know how I try—ever' day. But zey made me smell somezin' an' I go to sleep. I wake up here. In ze day I look all 'bout, but zere's no openin' but zis, none."

"There is another way, my Margot. It is hid-

den so you cannot find it. See! You could not have passed through here. And your food—how does it come?"

She shook her head despondently.

"I know not. Always in ze night sometime." Then, brightening a moment later: "How is Dor'thy?"

"Well, and happy as may be without your freedom, seeing she is deeply in love."

"Dor'thy in love! She use' to tell me she would never trus' any man."

"That was partly because she was young and foolish, and partly because the man had not come. It is he who got your note, who found your cave, and who, having let me down, sits above this instant in sleepless misery in order that we might see each other."

"If Dor'thy love not such a' one, I would!"

But the caress which followed allayed any jealousy the words might have aroused.

So for a long time they whispered back and forth while Sis Tomperby lay sleeping, unconscious of the mighty fact that love laughs at bolts and bars and will likewise find a way. Two old truisms which none can refute. Gaston did not know that the foot in the loop was aching terribly, and Margot was totally oblivious of the fact that a lighter tinge had been gradually creeping into the fog bank. But each heard a whistle which dropped to their ears from overhead. Chavannes gave a gesture of annoyance.

"'Tis he—Saul! He is signaling that it is time to go up. Only a moment has he allowed me!" The rope began to vibrate in his hand. "Good-bye, my sweetheart! We will come soon. Be ready!" He felt himself beginning to ascend. "A last kiss!—Tiptoe and you can!—Ah! Sweeter than all was that!" Then began steady pulls on

the rope, each of which brought him up five or six inches. "Farewell! Be brave! We come soon!—I love you!" Looking down at the spot he had left, he saw a small hand waved like the pinion of a white bird adrift in the nebulous vapor, and smiled.

It was little or nothing he could do to assist his comrade above. He could not lighten his weight, and he must needs depend entirely upon the physical strength of his friend. Twice he stopped on his slow upward journey, and each time he knew that the worn man at the other end of the rope was taking brief rest. Then the fog lessened, and soon he was at the cliff edge and pulling himself over it. Here he noticed that the first flush of day had indeed come, and in the wan light was Saul, both feet planted against the friendly scrub oak, his neck muscles bulging and face tinged and distorted by his fearful exertions. Hastily now the grateful Gaston scrambled forward, and Brentley lay back upon the ground, flinging his arms wide and getting his breath in deep gulps. But when the alarmed Frenchman bent over him it was to find his face a-smile and a gleam of humor in his tired eyes.

"Next time you go courting in this manner, *mon ami*," grumbled Brentley, between heaves, "you must rig up a painter's scaffold."

Chavannes sank to his thigh and clasped his friend's hand.

"No one in Normandy could be truer or better or braver than you! I think I love your Kentucky now."

"Good! She's deserving it!" grunted Saul, loyally. . . . "Did you wake Ma'mselle Margot of the cherry lips—and did you taste them?"

For an instant Chavannes puzzled between a frown and a smile, but the doubt was so fleeting

as not to be noticed. His grave face lighted with a pleased remembrance.

"I woke her—yes."

Brentley waved his hand.

"No need to go further with my question, then. And the hag?"

"Still sleeps, I trust. At least she did not disturb us for the minute you gave me."

"Minute!" echoed Saul. "Young man, for one hour and fifteen minutes you hung to that happy little tree, which Providence must have sown years ago to prepare for this contingency!"

"You jest! It is not possible! Just a greeting—a word—and I hear your whistle!"

"'Tis folly to argue with a man in love, but your contention speaks well for the quality of your affection." Then, with a smile: "Did not I myself spend just such a minute as you mention not five hours ago? Come. I think we are a precious pair of lunatics in need of keepers, but time presses and danger is near." Brentley arose to his feet, yawning. "Did your Dulcinea have no suggestion which would help us in our next move?"

Gaston's countenance was worried as he began to coil the rope.

"You need sleep. Yesterday was one of effort, and last night even worse for you. Your eyes have not closed. Take two hours—or even one."

"And are you not in like case? How many winks did you get while I sat with Dorothy? It seems our score is even."

"And yet I do not feel it. If anything I am more awake, and vigorous. You look almost exhausted."

Saul stretched his arms and breathed deeply.

"'Twould be criminal for either of us to sleep now, my Frenchman. Let's back to the horses,

where we will eat, and drink some spirits I have with me. As we walk I will tell you why we must act quickly and to effect."

The rope flung over his shoulder, Chavannes joined his friend without replying. As they walked swiftly away Brentley gave a brief recital of all that had befallen the previous night. A short exclamation broke from Gaston now and then, but when he heard how Mack Leek had been overtaken on his sinister errand back to the cliffs, a low oath escaped his lips.

"I warned him," continued Saul, "but a warning to such as he at such a time is words thrown away. I told him, too, that you were here and waiting for the sight of him once more."

Chavannes' hands were working; were closing into fists and opening again spasmodically.

"Oh, I fear that he will not come!" he murmured. "I fear that you have frightened him away! The Bearded Devil!"

The last three words were hissed between shut teeth.

"Don't let that thought give you concern," Saul assured him. "I suspect he is free of his bonds long ere this, for he is strong and cunning. And that is why we dare not think of rest. For he will instantly set his face toward this secret cavern, and you must remember that the way is open to him."

Gaston turned his eyes upon his friend, and again Saul saw that awful, unearthly, merciless light in them which he had seen once a short time before. They were positively sulphurous with hate and seemed to emit colored sparks. He began to speak, in a strained, suppressed manner.

"And we are helpless—helpless, unless we can intercept him, or find the passage. Is't not enough to take the mind of one and leave him

stark mad? How can we search with method in this tortured land, and how can we espy a creeping assassin when every rock and tree and hollow and bush is a hiding-place? Tell me, Saul. Give me hope, or I go crazy!"

He struck his forehead with his fist and ran his fingers wildly through his hair.

"We must be calm, above all things," advised Brentley, but his own face was troubled, for the difficulties just enumerated were all too real. A moment later: "I should have put a ball through the villain's heart."

There was no reply, and they proceeded in silence till they came to the sequestered spot where they had temporarily camped. Soon they were hastily partaking of the food already prepared which Uncle Bacchus had brought. Gaston seemed in the grip of an icy calm now. His naturally colorless features had become chalky, and his burning black eyes produced almost a gruesome effect. He was evidently holding himself in check by the exercise of great reserve will power, realizing the absolute necessity of control under whatever conditions might arise.

"Would it not be well to watch the road?" he asked, with lips which barely moved to let the words pass.

"Leek will detour," was the prompt reply. "His craft is great, and he knows these hills well. Our main hope lies in the strength of the hemp with which I tied him. Then it is early morning, and the road is not travelled much, so there is small chance for him to be released by anyone. Our case is far from desperate." He cast a goodly morsel to the waiting Dhu and produced a bottle of liquor. "Here, if you have finished eating, take several swallows of this. It will put new life in you and give you added strength."

Both drank the whisky, though not copiously, for Saul had been warned by experience of its subtle power.

It was just sunup.

XXIII

Showing how a collie dog can be of service in an entirely unexpected way; making clear the secret of Margot's prison-place; and concluding in a manner which the narrator earnestly hopes the reader will approve.

"Had you thought of the cabin where we found the stores as offering a possible clue?"

Chavannes spoke, still softly and in a constrained voice.

Brentley was standing with head bent, the fingers of one hand curved around his chin.

"No; I hadn't."

"It might be built over the spot we seek."

Love for his Margot was driving the brain of the Frenchman to increased action.

"The cave in the cliff seems too far away."

"But I have read of your country. Does it not hold caverns where miles are piled upon miles?"

"It does. Your idea is worth investigating."

Glancing at the horses tethered in a gully to his left, and seeing that they were well secured and busy munching corn, Saul at once led the way to the dilapidated structure which they had stumbled upon two days before. Entering by means of the key, they found the provisions undisturbed. Everything was exactly as it had been as well as they could determine. The rough floor was dirty and dusty and partly decayed, as Brentley discovered when he began to scrape around upon it with the toe of his boot.

"No trap-door here, my boy," he announced. "I doubt if a plank has been lifted since it was first nailed down. But to be sure, here is a loose one I'll raise." He tugged at the piece of wood and soon flung it clattering aside. Lighting a match, he examined the ground beneath. "As I thought, there's nothing. We must look further."

Outside, they stood for a few moments in silent perplexity. There was nothing to indicate which course they should pursue, yet prompt action was imperative.

"Let's work back toward the cave," said Saul. "I see a kind of ravine yonder which parallels in a general way the course of the river. I believe that is our best chance."

"Anything, so it is action," returned Gaston. "To stand here another five minutes would kill me!"

A short time later found them trudging along the bed of a dry watercourse with rather precipitous sides. These sides were ribbed in places with outjutting stones, a fact which gave Brentley encouragement. They were also scored with little sluices where the soil was free from vegetation, and dotted here and there with bushes and matted growth of vines. The ravine appeared to be the main conduit for the water from heavy rains, for as they proceeded they found that smaller ones debouched into it. Progress was difficult in places on account of boulder-like obstructions, but it was not until they had covered nearly two miles, as well as Saul could estimate, that he advised a halt. Chavannes had been walking with head down, for the time leaving his companion to look for the possible opening, and as Saul stopped with the suggestion that they rest a while, the Frenchman pointed to a stone about six feet further on

which glistened damply. A second later both were kneeling beside it.

"Turned over by a hasty foot," observed Saul.

"By the heel of the Bearded Devil," supplemented Gaston, his finger resting on a glancing scar on the top of the stone near its edge.

Moved by a common impulse, two pairs of eyes sought the side of the ravine. Nothing was revealed. Its slant was a little less steep, and at its top stood Roderick Dhu, who had been ranging for some time. The dog sighted his master, and after a moment's hesitation began to descend. Ten feet down the crumbling soil tripped him, his struggles threw him off his balance, and he began sliding and rolling alternately. Over half way to the bottom he collided with a bush, bounced off into a mass of vines at which he clawed desperately, and brought up presently on his feet, unhurt. But neither man had eyes for the dog now. Watching his rapid career, they had seen his paws tear the thick vines asunder, and back of the rent was blackness—an aperture in the direction of the river!

The friends rushed forward, but Gaston gained it first.


"Let us pray we have found the right one," breathed Saul.

"Look where his foot has slipped!" returned the sharp-eyed Chavannes. "Follow me, my comrade, and be quick!"

They entered stooping, and saw they were in a subterranean corridor encompassed entirely with stone, and leading south. Saul ordered Dhu to remain outside. Turning——

"I think luck is with us," he said, "if there are no ramifications."

"We must take any risk now," was the tense reply. "Remember, she is practically alone. I'll



take the right wall and you the other. Keep your hand constantly upon it, and if either come to a break in the surface we will light a match. Come."

They began their advance in a crouching posture because of the low roof, and were soon in total darkness, darkness so dense that it seemed almost a substance. Chavannes moved with marvelous rapidity, considering that a pit might await each step, but he had temporarily cast aside all caution. His all-important mission was to succor the girl he loved in her hour of distress and danger. One hand outheld before his face to guard against any possible stalactite or drop in the roof, the other lightly feeling the wall, he moved on the balls of his feet, in all but a run. His friend was put to it to keep the pace, but he loyally pressed forward and managed never to be out of hearing of the other's steps. It would seem that a relenting Fate indeed had taken charge of their destinies now, for, with only a slight curve here and there, the passage was traversed without difficulty, even in that Stygian night. Suddenly Gaston stopped with a subdued exclamation. Saul reached his side, whispering:

"What is it?"

"I heard voices!"

"Are you sure?"

"Listen!"

Muffled tones were indeed filtering to their ears. The first they heard were thin and sounded far off. Then followed the rumble of a man's voice, echoing like low thunder through the terrible silence. Chavannes' teeth clicked, and he was gone. When he had followed a dozen paces Saul saw a match flare. The next moment he had entered a low, cramped chamber, which marked the end of the corridor. Gaston, breathing incoherent mutterings, was moving around the rough-

ly circular walls, a lighted match between finger and thumb, searching desperately for another opening. There was none, as Brentley could see at a glance. Their corridor was a blind alley, had led them nowhere. And as the Frenchman's brain finally accepted this, it proved a little more than he could endure. He sank upon a large stone partially imbedded at one side, and despairingly hid his face in his hands.

Saul stood in the gloom and did the hardest bit of thinking to which he had ever subjected his mind. They had heard voices. It could not have been imagination. Somewhere near at hand were Margot LaTour, Mack Leek, and the kind-hearted hag, Sis Tomperby. In their last rush they might have missed a bisecting passage. That seemed the only possible solution, and taking a match from his pocket he was preparing to investigate, when the rough voice of the bandit boomed out, apparently so close that the young fellow jumped and dropped his hand to his pistol.

"Are you comin' or not?" the voice demanded. "I ain't got time to fool away. If you'll come peaceable, all right. If you won't, I've got more o' that stuff to put you to sleep!"

Saul's match blazed up as Chavannes leaped to his side and clutched his arm.

"Has God forgotten us and sent the devil to torment us?" he hissed, his face drawn.

"Sh-h-h-h!"

A woman's clear treble was answering.

"I will not go wiz you, m'sieu!"

"You won't!" A short laugh. "Why, I could pinch you in two like I would a weed. . . . Are her clothes all ready, Sis?"

The crone's reply came less distinctly.

"In this bundle, sir."

"All right. . . . Young lady, I'm goin' to

give you your last chance. I tell you that fur'ner 'an that meddlin' friend o' his are nosin' aroun' here, an' we've got to hide over. For the last time—are you comin'?"

"No, m'sieu!" instantly and bravely.

Followed an oath and the shuffling of feet. A scream was stifled.

Chavannes tore his hair and cursed. Saul lighted another match, thrust it in the excited lover's hand, and in two bounds was standing astride the big stone upon which his friend had been sitting. Bending down, he grasped the rock upon either side and heaved. Up it came, noiselessly, revealing a natural trap-door into which it fitted perfectly, and which gave into Margot LaTour's prison chamber. Dropping to one knee, Brentley swung his heavy Colts forward. But Chavannes' hand fell upon his shoulder.

"The Bearded Devil is mine!" he rasped out, "remember your promise!"

A second later he had dropped to the room below.

Brentley lay at length and viewed the scene, his weapon ready and finger on trigger. He paid no heed to the general appearance of the chamber, for the actors in the drama which speedily unfolded claimed all his attention. The old crone was huddled back against the wall farthest away, her bony hands clasped under her sharp chin, her withered lips moving in wordless protest at the scene before her. Crushed back and held down upon a couch near Sis Tomperby was Margot, struggling in the grip of Mack Leek as ineffectually as a mouse might under a lion's paw. The big outlaw, keeping the girl prostrate with one hand, employed the other in saturating a handkerchief with the contents of a small bottle. This handkerchief he had rudely thrust against her

nostrils, when something befell which the watching Saul could scarcely believe, even though he saw it.

With one leap Chavannes was by the bandit's side. His right hand went out to the collar of the big man's coat, and the next instant his great body seemed to fly backward through the air. At the least, it went reeling the entire length of the cave and brought up at the jagged slit overlooking the river. What was in the Frenchman's slender, graceful form to accomplish such a feat Brentley could not guess, for the huge bulk he handled thus easily must have weighed near to three hundred pounds.

"Go, my beloved!" cried Chavannes, pointing to the rescuing arms which Saul intuitively dropped through the hole. "He is our friend!"

"Oh, Gaston!" cried Margot, all but hysterical with surprise and a sense of relief. "But you?"

"Presently. I have a little work to do first. Hurry, my own!"

She obeyed him, not understanding fully, but gladly submitting to his will. Holding up her arms trustingly, she let Brentley draw her to safety.

"Oh, why does my Gaston stay?" she implored.

"I think to fight, lady," replied Brentley, realizing no falsehood would serve, as she would hear sounds of conflict.

"Ask him to come wizout zat!" pleaded Margot. "I wish it not!"

"'Twould be useless. . . . Sit to one side, and rest. I must watch, and should Gaston need it a ball from my revolver will fly to his rescue."

The poor girl flung an arm across her eyes and sank to the ground, moaning softly, and then Saul knew that the hag was standing just beneath, signaling distressfully with her hands. So pres-

ently she was crouching beside Margot, comforting her with word and touch, and saying many beautiful things of the lover who had so gallantly and fearlessly come to her rescue.

During the brief time which had intervened from the moment he was hurled backward until Margot was lifted from view, Leek seemed in a sort of daze, as though the thing which had just occurred to him were totally incomprehensible. He stood with his broad back partly covering the narrow fissure, blinking as one who rouses quickly from deep slumber. And he was blinking at Chavannes—the almost dandified-looking young Frenchman with the white, strained face and burning eyes. Gaston had thrown off his dark velvet coat as Margot made her ascent, and subsequently rolled his sleeves to his elbows. Then from a hidden sheath on his left hip he drew the Spanish stiletto with its eight-inch blade, a hilt of some dark, carved wood, and a handle of wrought brass.

“Beast, are you armed?”

He asked the question in modulated accents which were hard as steel.

Leek did not answer in words, but his face cleared of the stupid expression, and a glare of hate and vindictiveness shone in his eyes. He felt within his shirt and produced a knife, much smaller than the one of which Brentley had disarmed him.

“’Twill serve,” came the icy voice again. “Were it long as a sword it would not avail you this day. Mine is longer, but yours is broader. So let us call it even.”

A swift shadow of fear crossed the rather heavy features of the giant. He failed to understand what the chalk-faced fool was driving at who stood there in a careless attitude and used such queer

words. So he began to twist his beard into a rope—his most characteristic action when angered or perplexed. And as he twined and turned it around his hand he eyed Chavannes craftily.

Gaston advanced one foot and slowly bent forward from the waist.

"Guard yourself!" he hissed.

Then scarcely before the watcher overhead could quite grasp the action the Frenchman had dashed forward with a lightning sweep of his arm and was back where he had formerly stood, swaying his graceful body from one foot to the other, a set, fixed smile which showed his teeth upon his face. Brentley's mouth fell open in astonishment at the fury and rapidity of the attack. When he glanced at the bandit it was to see one ear gone, sliced neatly from his head, while blood was running into the big man's beard and dripping from it. Again the smiling figure in the ruffled white silk shirt charged. His antagonist attempted to meet this rush, but even as he raised his arm to strike or parry, his elusive foe had cut, and was back out of reach. And the giant's cheek lay open from ear to nostril as neatly as though a skilled butcher had been at work. A thrill of horror ran through Saul. Was his outraged friend really going to hew his enemy down in strips! Even though the provocation had been great, such a procedure as this would be barbarous. Brentley thrust his head further through the hole, so that his words would not reach the still sobbing Margot, and spoke.

"Don't murder him by inches, my comrade! It would be inhuman! You have cause for thanksgiving, for the flower of your heart is safe and unhurt. Be merciful, and finish it quickly!"

He talked rapidly and earnestly, and he knew he was heard, for the one addressed stood only a

few feet away. But not once did Gaston turn his head, or give any indication that he was aware of being spoken to. He merely smiled in that ghastly way, and swayed from foot to foot, and watched the man he knew was in his power.

Mack Leek knew it too. His eyes had grown large and round, and terror shone in them. His glance was not steady like his opponent's, but roved about the narrow place as though searching for some way of escape. He even turned in desperation to the rent in the stone next the river, to find that it was only a prison window. He was trapped. His career was ended, and he realized it. Suddenly, with a movement unexpected and remarkably dextrous, he hurled his knife at the man facing him. The distance could not have been over a dozen feet and the rapidity of the cast was marvelous. Saul felt his spine creep as he witnessed it. How it was done he could never tell, but Gaston eluded the flying steel. Then he leaped straight at the outlaw, and this time he did not retreat. Agile and sinuous, he clung to the burly form of the man who had wronged him. At times their legs were entwined, again he seemed to sit astride his foe's waist, and again to kneel on his shoulders. In vain Leek tore with his hands and beat with his fists. He could not shake off this vengeance which had overtaken him.

Saul, sickened, closed his eyes and drew back, then lay with his body covering the hole so as to muffle and deaden any sound below which might affront the ears of a sensitive maid. Listening closely himself, he heard the fall which came soon thereafter. Following it quickly was the composed voice of his fellow-adventurer.

"Take the bundles first, my boy, the young lady's and her old friend's. Then lend me a hand and we'll be going."

This was done, then Saul rolled the stone back into the opening, and presently the little party of four were passing through the corridor toward the ravine where Dhu kept watch.

And back in the small chamber where his sins had exacted their toll, the lifeless body of Mack Leek lay in a grander sarcophagus than any king or emperor has ever known.

XXIV

Bringing to our hero a severe blow, and asking all who would listen to lovers' twaddle to go mooning with them in an orchard all abloom.

There was great rejoicing late that afternoon when four riders drew rein under the big sugar tree in Captain Pembroke's front yard. Margot and Sis Tomperby had been mounted on the horses which Saul and Gaston had ridden, but these doughty and resourceful young gentlemen had secured other horses along the road, which accounted for the arrival of the entire party in the manner stated. There were embraces and kisses and tears and laughter and felicitations and questions endless. And later there was a spread in the dining-room where merriment and joyous feeling reigned. It was here that Saul, sitting across from his Dorothy, whither she had wisely placed him so that she might eat in peace—for well the little minx knew he would be attempting to hold her hand every minute—it was here that Saul, I say, catching the inconstant eye of his inamorata, winked his own and inclined his head surreptitiously toward the back porch, where the broken-winged mockingbird dwelt. Naturally Mistress Dorothy could not begin to understand such mysterious signs as these, and she only looked at Saul in a perplexed way, making the poor fellow blush.

Nevertheless, when the long meal was over Brentley watched his opportunity and slipped out a side door to the rendezvous. And there, bless you, the lady was already waiting, poking crumbs

through the bars of the cage to her pet! I would like to say that now followed a period of utter silence for at least sixty seconds, which is a round minute, but being no judge of such matters I can only say that at last there was the unmistakable sound of lips parting, the like of which cannot be duplicated by any other known sound, and then came a heavy sigh, or two blended, mayhap.

She: "Aren't you ashamed to keep a lady waiting?"

He: "My darling!"

She: "Does that answer my question?"

He: "I came at the first chance. And you pretended not to know!"

She: "Know what?"

He: "That I wanted to tryst with you here."

She: "I didn't know. Was that why you made a face at me at table?"

He: (laughing happily) "That's exactly why."

She: "I always give Mocker his supper."

He: "I didn't think birds ate after night!"

She: (stamping) "Do you doubt my word, sir?"

He: (foolishly) "I'd as soon doubt yonder moon!"

She: (tittering) "Or be a dog, and bay it!"

He: (clasping her) "Oh, you adorable girl!"

She: (calmly) "How can I feed Mocker with my arms held?"

He: "Bother Mocker! Let the poor fellow sleep and listen to me."

She put her head back till his chin sank in her soft hair.

"I believe you are inclined to be masterful in your ways," she said.

He took one deep breath, but hesitated no longer in his reply.

"When we are married, dear, I will be master. I do not mean by this that I will be overbearing

or headstrong. We shall take counsel together, as every man and woman who truly love should, but I am to be head of the home which we shall establish."

The girl trembled in his arms, sighed gently, then relaxed against him. There were a few seconds of silence.

"Don't you think Margot and Gaston will want the portico or the parlor to themselves?" asked Saul.

He saw her head nod.

"Then let us go out to the orchard, where we went once before. I want to talk to you, about ourselves, and the future. You may have my coat if it grows too chilly."

She lifted her face, lovely indeed, and sweetly serious now, touched as with the reflection of some wonderful spiritual glow.

"I want to talk to you, too—about things," she replied, and a qualm shot through him, for he thought he knew what she meant.

They left the porch and went around the rear of the house, where the quarters were, and on across the bluegrass carpet to the picket gate in the orchard fence. The air was faintly fragrant with peach and apple blossoms, and a dewy incense floated up from the ground.

Saul spoke slow.

"Surely there is a place where we may sit? I know you must come here often."

"Yes, there's a settle yonder—just a little way."

When they had found it—

"Will you go back with me soon, my sweetheart?" asked Brentley, tenderly folding her to him. "My mission is done which you gave me to perform, and I've a feeling that I did wrong in leaving father."

"How strange it seems to hear such words," she murmured. "But they are sweet to my ears. And there is only one thought to mar my happiness this hour."

"I know. You want it all made plain why I left home because of a girl, don't you?"

"I have believed all you have told me, but I cannot help wondering."

Saul pressed one of her warm palms to his cheek and held it there.

"It was merely the folly of a rather reckless youth, my Dorothy. I can't tell you how I regret it now. And I foolishly plighted troth with her before I left."

"Oh!"

"You're getting all the truth, little girl. I thought I loved her, truly. When I met you I realized I didn't. It is quite simple, after all. Of course her pride will suffer for a while, but I don't think her nature deep enough to feel the hurt long."

"But her people, her family, will they not——"

"She has no one but a half-way sort of relative who keeps a tavern near our plantation."

His cheeks were burning with honest shame, but he did not falter or attempt any sort of subterfuge.

Dorothy's shoulders quivered as she sat erect and shook away the arms which held her.

"Keeps a *tavern*!" she echoed.

"Yes, and the girl serves at the bar. There! You have it all! . . . Wait!—wait!"

For Miss Pembroke had jumped to her feet and was running swiftly from him between the rows of blooming trees. Springing up, Brentley pursued her, calling beseechingly: "For heaven's sake, Dorothy, stay one moment!"

Possibly it was the distressed note in his voice which worked upon her; perhaps it was her idea

to stop anyway if he asked her to; but at any rate she became still and awaited him without turning. He stood by her side, but did not touch her.

"Are you going to condemn me because I was honest with you?" he asked, in gentle rebuke. "I know what you are thinking; that I have turned from a barmaid of whom I have tired to you—the daughter of a large landholder and an aristocrat. You are wrong to judge me thus. That girl has no earthly claim upon me other than a silly promise exacted at the moment of leaving. Our affair was of short duration, and I saw her only a few times alone. And I will swear to you by everything I hold sacred that my feeling for you is as far above that I had for her as the stars are above us both this instant."

Dorothy stood with laced fingers and bowed head, knowing within her heart that she would yield, yet femininely loathe to indicate in any way her submission. Saul continued:

"Come back; sit down and let's have an understanding. Be fair as you are beautiful and I will ask for nothing else. How could I know that womanly perfection lived just a night's journey down the river? Else I never would have looked twice at Jinsy Galory!"

"Galory!"

The word burst explosively from the lips of the startled girl, and she flung her hand to her temple in a gesture of distress. For the story which her Aunt Mehitabel had told her but a short time ago, and upon which she had brooded so much when alone, was revived and given new meaning now. She stood silent, trying to think; trying to order her confused thoughts.

Saul's fingers closed around her arm.

"What is it? And why did you repeat the name

as though you were familiar with it?" Then, as she neither stirred nor answered: "Let's go back to the settle and have an understanding. I am penitent for that escapade, which has harmed, and will harm, no one. And I love you—you! Surely you cannot doubt my devotion for a moment? It is unseemly in a man to speak of what he has done, but you thrust it on me. Do you think it but a holiday affair to find Margot and bring her safely to your home? Be just, sweet lady, and listen to your heart. Sometimes it is far wiser than the head, and I believe that I need its counsel with you this moment. Does that joyous second by the old spinet count for nothing? And shall we cast away as though it had never been that happy hour on the stair landing last night, as you gave me the unspeakable bliss of your dear arms when I had fought for *you*? When my love almost made me forget my waiting comrade on the river cliffs? Ah, love! You cannot but know I am true, and if my confession has pained you my loyal love will quickly heal the wound. So come, and we will straighten out all tangles, as those who trust each other should. We must not part to-night until we are in full accord."

So reasonably and so convincingly did he plead, and withal so sweetly, that Dorothy meekly turned and walked back with him. When they were seated again:

"And do you forgive me?" he said.

She nodded dumbly, but the bright moonlight showed lines on her pure forehead, and her troubled eyes were staring hard at her knees.

"Then smile at me, little Sober Face, and laugh a bit if you can!"

She whirled with lifted chin and raised her hands to his shoulders.

"Why are *none* exempt from pain and misery, Saul? Tell me!"

"My sweet, don't let what I have said be such a heavy weight upon you. Indeed——"

"It's not that. It's something else. Why can't all people be good, so that other innocent people might be happy?"

Brentley ran his fingers through his hair in a puzzled way.

"That is a question which I doubt if the wisest man in the world could answer, and you have put it to a very plain-witted person who is already more than a mite confused by the beauty of a girl and the magic of moonlight." He smiled and covered her hands with his. "Let's not bother this night with such deep matters. Let's be just happy, and talk foolishness."

He tried to draw her closer, but she resisted gently, her face still shadowed.

"I must tell you something first, Saul, and—and—it will hurt."

A sickening thrill swept over Brentley as he heard. Could it be possible this fair young being's life held a secret which she felt she must reveal before wholly accepting his declared love? Could this perfumed flower of a woman which he had already enshrined sacredly in his heart have a spotted petal? It was impossible! With this conviction he threw off the numbing weight which was settling upon him, breathed deeply, and said:

"I am listening, dear. I think I could hear a death sentence from your lips, and smile."

She dropped her hands to her lap and began to move them nervously, one over the other.

"I don't know how to tell you—how to begin. I've never spoken of such things to a man. But—you must know, somehow." She ceased for a moment, then went on hurriedly. "I was talking

to Aunt Hittie about you, and—and—how I liked you lots, and she said I had better be mighty careful because—because she mistrusted men. And—she said—twenty years ago—a—a Brentley did an awful wrong to a poor woman near here, then ran away and left her. She was afraid that—and the woman's name was Galory—Kitty Galory!”

Dorothy, with a gulp in her throat, turned her back, flung her arms out along the settle and hid her burning face in them.

Saul sat like an image of stone. For the soft, odorous, radiance-filled night had suddenly grown black. Gradually his vision cleared, but the damning truth remained, naked and horrible. The story then was true which he had heard at Hillsboro one night between midnight and morning, when a young blade with a turn for malicious sayings had told him of his father's defection and been soundly whipped for his pains. And Fate had exacted the penalty, for Jinsy Galory was his father's daughter—the daughter he had deserted before her tiny heart began to beat! This sudden revelation, with all which it entailed, fell like a crushing physical blow upon young Brentley. He groaned as a strong man might when hurt to the heart, then bent over with his palms to his face, and sobbed unashamed.

It was then the lover-soul of Dorothy awoke to its full nobility. Forgetting her own sorrow, which was a trivial one indeed in the presence of his, she cast herself on her knees before the man and wound her arms about his neck and smoothed his hair and cuddled her cheek against his ear, crooning sweet meaningless words at first, as her black mammy had done to her in childhood, then whispering fervent sentences which calmed the tumult in the mind so beset by emotion. Then,

when she saw he had control again, Dorothy ceased speaking, and crouched with his head held tightly to her neck.

A beetle went droning by on its aimless journey, recking not nor knowing what it missed in being free from the woes and blisses of humankind. Enough for it the brief evolution from egg to larva, from larva to beetle. A burrow in the warm brown earth; a series of days and nights with constant buzzing here and there—then back to dust to begin again the endless cycle. Likewise the heavy-bodied gray moth which hovered for a moment over Dorothy's misty crown, then labored blindly on to what bourne it knew not.

It was the girl's voice which said:

"My Saul!"

He drew her to him with the hand which lay on her shoulder.

"I do love you—all of me—and if there is anything to forgive, I forgive you," she continued. "You poor boy! How sorry I was to have to tell you, but it had to come. You understand, don't you, and think I did right?"

Her voice was tenderly plaintive, and stirred the listener strangely.

"Yes, you were right. I'm trying to realize it. Why men of my father's birth, descent and position should so far forget—oh, it's monstrous! And the other part, that I should have thought I loved this girl." He carefully released her arms and sat erect. "What are you going to do now?" he concluded.

"What am I going to do?"—bewildered.

"About all this mess into which I have dragged you?"

"Why—just—love you as hard as I can, that's all!"

After a few moments:

"And you'll go back home with me, and marry me? I've promised dad not to wed without his consent, you know."

"Father wouldn't let me travel so far without a chaperone, and I couldn't run away. He's been so good to me always."

"I fancy company will not be lacking, for if Gaston and Margot be not traveling soon, then the signs I've observed ever since they met must go for naught."

"Margot must rest at least a week after her terrible experience, and really I should try and persuade her to stay for a month or two."

Saul smiled in satisfied content.

"It's a rare little tease that I've found, isn't it? Beg all you wish. I'll warrant the tongue of a certain Chavannes will have greater weight than all your prattling. And if they are not ready to take the eastbound coach before your seven days have sped—I miss my guess, that's all."

Her head went to his shoulder, and she drew his arm under hers, around her waist.

"Do you suppose they could possibly be as silly as we?" she wanted to know.

"It is difficult to believe, but they might. There are certain speeches and actions which belong to all people in our condition, you know. For instance" (kiss) "none were ever known to object to that" (kiss) "who were truly" (kiss), "in love. And I venture to assert that if they are favored by fortune as we are tonight, then Margot's head is either on Gaston's shoulder or his breast, and that if his arm is around her waist hers is at least around his neck."

"You know I can't reach your neck, Saul!"

"Certainly not. I was speaking of our other lovers."

Passed an indeterminate period of silence. At last there came, drowsily:

"Saul?"

"Yes, darling."

"I was 'most asleep."

"Mustn't sleep in the moonlight; it makes people foolish."

"S'pose they're already foolish?"

"It makes them foolisher."

A contented sigh, and another silence, briefer than the first.

"Saul?"

"Yes, sweet."

"Why do they call it honeymoon?"

"Why—why—just because it is one, I reckon, dearie."

This time it was a yawn, followed by complete relaxation. She lay against his side, her body fitted to his. A third time, barely audible:

"Saul?"

"Yes, little girl."

"Will we have one?"

"One what, my precious?"

"Honey—moon."

"Indeed we will!"

And when Brentley bent his head to look a few minutes later he saw she was asleep in his arms.

XXV

Ending our story happily; and trusting the reader will agree with the author that a certain Will Shakespeare wrote passing wisely when he averred "All's well that ends well."

It was another morning in April, and Colonel Shadrach Brentley was sitting by his desk in the big front room facing the river. The hour was not as early as upon the day this story opened, neither was Colonel Shad racked by the acute misery which possessed him then. Dr. Van Wyck's opinion, for all the sufferer's disbelief, had proven correct, and the gouty foot had steadily improved. So when we again view the Colonel at about nine o'clock in the morning, it is to find him comparatively free from pain after a good night and a breakfast which he had eaten with relish, although the cantankerous foot was still swathed and resting upon a pillow-topped hassock. The master had just rolled and lighted a cigarette, and with the same match was consuming a sheet of paper which he had taken from a pigeon-hole in his desk, and which bore his own handwriting. This paper was the document which he had prepared for his son to sign, and which the young man had refused to do.

Came a knock on the door. The Colonel invited an entrance, but did not take his eyes from the burning paper, held by one corner. The door opened and closed and steps crossed the room. The Colonel dropped the charred fragrant on his broad silver ash tray and turned his head. His son stood before him.

"I want to apologize to you, dad," said Saul, "for my actions and my words before I left home. I want to tell you I am truly sorry, and ask your pardon. Is it granted?"

Colonel Shad gazed upon the upstanding, manly fellow who bore his name. Pride tinged his face. He smiled and stretched out his hand.

"Welcome home, my boy! Perhaps there is another who should ask pardon of some one, too."

Saul's eyes shone with gladness as he clasped his sire's hand in both of his.

"No—no—sir! I was wrong. But how good it is to hear you say 'welcome home'!"

"I've missed you," replied the Colonel, simply, reaching for his smoking materials.

"And the gout's better?" questioned Saul, cheerily, drawing a chair nearer his father, and sitting.

"Oh, yes. Van Wyck's not quite the fool I thought him. Your aunt tells me she had a letter, mailed from Cedarton."

"Yes, I've been down in that part of the country, and have had quite an adventure of which I'll tell you later. Just now I want to talk to you about—about the cause of all this trouble."

Following his sentence a keen embarrassment gripped both father and son. Colonel Shad tried to hide his by fingering over his half-made cigarette, but he quickly squared his shoulders and faced the issue. He said:

"Yes, let's talk it over and be done with it. Allow me, if you please, to speak first. You probably do not know that the last name of the girl had never reached my ears. The day after you left I sent for her. I was sick, in pain, and half-crazy. When I first saw her she gave me a fearful shock, for she was the reincarnation of a woman I had known in my reckless youth. I

asked her name, all of it, and she told me." He stopped, raised one slender hand to cheek and forehead so that his face was shaded before he went on. "My boy, that accusation you hurled in my face the day you were so angry, is true. I did yield to a base passion when I should have been strong, and Jinsy Galory is my child. I told her the truth, and the scene which ensued was harrowing indeed. She loved you, and the thought of giving you up tore her cruelly. I comforted her as well as I could, and bade her say nothing to anyone, but come back the next day. I spent the night on the problem, fighting remorse and planning for her. I wanted to do for her what was best under the circumstances. She was calm the next morning and we talked in friendly way. She was amenable, and accepted the situation with far more grace than I had supposed she would. She is now in a school in Boston, as my niece. I shall of course provide for her as long as she lives, unless she marries."

This confession was not an easy one for a father to make to his son, and the Colonel's voice showed the strain under which he was laboring. When it was finished there was a long silence.

"I don't know that there is anything for me to say, sir," Saul's voice came at last. "I think you did exactly right in looking after Jinsy, but, as far as I am concerned, I had already found out that my affection for her was not what I had thought it to be."

Colonel Shad smiled wanly, and dropped his hand.

"Emmeline delivered your message, which, I confess, pleased me. But there are usually causes for such abrupt changes. She did not indicate that you mentioned any reasons."

Saul's face grew hot, and he rubbed his knees together while trying to find a suitable reply.

"I—you know, sir, I promised not to marry any girl without your consent!" he blurted out, in frank confusion.

"Very true. But we are not discussing matrimony now."

"No, sir, but—but I believe we'll have to get on the subject."

The Colonel's eyes widened. Saul went on desperately.

"Did you ever hear of the Pembrokes, sir, down in King County?"

"I think not"—carefully.

"They're fine folks, dad, 'pon my honor! And you see I'm in love with Dorothy and she with me, and I want your consent and blessing."

Colonel Shad was not devoid of humor, and this most excellent quality crept to his brain as he listened to his son's fervent outburst.

"This is extraordinary, my boy! Could I conscientiously agree to such a thing when I had never seen the young lady? Maybe you're being roped in?"

Saul flushed, and rose.

"You may judge for yourself, dad. She is here."

"What!"

"With Aunt Emmeline. We came to Hillsboro chaperoned by two others of whom you shall hear duly, and drove down together this morning. May I ask her in?"

Now the master of the plantation frowned and began flicking stray bits of ash from his dressing-gown.

"Hardly in fit attire to meet a bride-to-be, am I? But if you wish, why——"

Saul was gone.

When he reappeared he was leading by the hand grace and beauty united in one charming girl figure. At least she seemed so to Colonel Shad as she came smiling toward him, a little maidenly timidity apparent, but no artificial holding back.

"Father," said Saul, his voice vibrant with pride, "this is Dorothy Pembroke, whom I love and wish to marry."

A rich glow spread over the maiden's face when she heard this and her lips trembled, but her hand went out to meet the one held toward her.

"Pardon me for not rising to greet you," said Colonel Shad, in his most courtly tones. "My son tells me he has the impudence to love you."

Dorothy gave a fluttering sort of laugh.

"Yes, sir; I think he means it."

"And you are silly enough to love him?"

"I can't help it."

"And you want the blessing of a broken old man?"

"We seek my father's blessing," replied Saul, gravely.

They knelt by his chair, and Colonel Shad put a hand which trembled upon each head.

"May you ever walk in the light of love, my children, which will never fail if kept burning by the lamp of truth. Never let the cloak of suspicion shadow your mutual trust. Live in and for each other, and your days will be happy. . . . Now I would be alone."

In silence the lovers withdrew, as from a sanctuary, while Colonel Shad, with eyes grown moist, sat staring at the snowy curtains which rose and fell at the embrasured window.

THE END.

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